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ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER AT THE NEW YORK, N. Y., POST OFFICE.

September 26, 1894.

No. 831.

Published Every
Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year.

Vol. LXIV.



SHADOWING The London Detective; OR, Harvey Hawk's Short-Stop.

BY CAPT. HOWARD HOLMES,
AUTHOR OF "CAPTAIN COLDGRIP" NOVELS,
"PLUSH VELVET," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

POPSY VANE'S CUSTOMER.

THERE were few persons who did not know Popsy Vane, yet if the many had been asked they would have confessed that, after all, they did not know the old man.

He lived alone in a building which he was said to own, within the very shadow of

THE OLD MAN'S HAND PUSHED THE HALF-FINISHED LETTER UNDERNEATH A BLOTTER ON THE DESK AND HE TURNED HIS FULL ATTENTION TO HIS VISITOR.

Trinity steeple, and no people went to him save those who had important business with Old Popsy.

Indeed he had nailed a tin card to his door in which he had traced this sentence:

"NO BUSINESS, NO ADMITTANCE."

Popsy Vane was a living mystery, past fifty, thin of face and beardless, with sharp eyes that seemed capable of looking into the secret depths of one's soul and long hands that seemed eager to close on the almighty dollar, no matter in what shape it came to him.

He was book-worm, astrologer, maker of strange philters and what not, yet there were none bold enough to say that he went beyond the law in his business.

Singular people climbed the stairs that led to his place and transacted business with him.

Old Popsy was always at home and they were not unrewarded for the weary climb.

No one knew anything about the old man's history, and if he had a past he kept it from the public and from his patrons.

Broadway was swarming with its usual crowd late one afternoon, in fact just as the lights were being lighted, for darkness came rather suddenly that day on account of threatening weather and Popsy Vane sat alone in his room.

He sat at his desk with an ink-stand in front of him and his cadaverous face bent over the oil cloth.

The old man expected no visitor at that hour for he had no engagements, and when the knob turned he looked up with a start.

Before him stood a tall, handsome fellow of perhaps thirty.

He looked quite dandified in his short coat and broad-rimmed hat which set jauntily upon a head well covered with a mass of half curly nut-brown hair.

His hands were white and scrupulously clean.

A heavy mustache hid his well-formed mouth, but in his eyes which were dark Old Popsy could see the latent gleam of sensuality which might have been confirmed by the lips but for the mustache.

This man on spying Popsy shut the door very carefully behind him.

The old man who had turned in his chair was looking at his visitor as if wondering what had brought him up the narrow stair case.

"Popsy Vane?" said the caller, stopping near the desk and leaning forward with manifest curiosity.

The thin face was bowed thus answering the query.

"By Jove! I'm lucky. Was fearing, you know, that you might not be in just now. Didn't know when you shut up shop, you see, and I said to myself as I came up: 'What if I find him out?'"

"I'm seldom out," said Popsy.

"Eh? Never go out, but roost 'way up here near the sky."

"It's not very high."

"Not to you whose legs are used to the climb; I guess not; but to a chap like me—it's different, you see."

The old man's hand pushed the half finished letter underneath a blotter on the desk and turned his full attention to his visitor.

"You want to see me?" he said.

"Jehu! do you think I would climb 'way up here just to look into this room? I'm here on business, but you don't care to have your callers seated."

Popsy Vane never apologized; he merely smiled, showing a lot of yellow teeth, and then waved his hand toward a cushioned chair near the stranger.

The silent invitation to be seated was accepted and the next moment the old man's caller said:

"You do a good many things, I hear. You sell a great many little knick-knacks not known to the profession."

"How?" inquired Old Popsy, leaning forward, startled a little by these words.

"Beg pardon. I'm a strange duck; don't know half the time what I'm saying. Always was that way and I guess I'll never get over it. You sell some things, I hear."

There was no sign of a reply from the old man. He sat stolid in the chair and looked at the speaker, taking him in from head to foot as if he were a suspicious character.

"Well, let's come to business," suddenly resumed the sport. "I can't stay here all day, and you don't like to fool long over a bargain, and a devilish good one at that."

He moved his chair a little closer to the astrologer, eying him all the time. Old Popsy noticed the hands again and saw that they were white, faultless and without a sign of blood.

"I want to get one of your quieters."

Old Popsy started and for the first time since the man's entrance he showed some animation.

He seemed to straighten in his chair, and his figure, long already, appeared to get another inch.

"How?" he asked.

"You are obtuse, of course," and the speaker smiled. "You are not supposed to understand what I mean and I don't blame you. I am here to bargain for a quieter."

Popsy Vane moved uneasily in his seat and then shut one hand.

"I don't keep such things," he said, without taking his eyes from the man before him.

"Hang it all, old man, you can't fool me. I came here to pay for what we get and—"

The closed hand opened and Old Popsy leaned forward.

"I don't make such things," he answered with some positiveness.

"Pardon me again, but you do. It all goes with your regular business. What means the stream of people, men and women, aye and young girls, who come up these stairs? Do all of them come solely to let you cast their horoscope and tell them what you find out among the stars? Have all the women some love affair on hand and all the men some speculation which they want to see go right? Do you think I believe such stuff? Come, I'm in a hurry. I want one of those secret quieters which I happen to know you make."

The old man in the chair at the desk was about to put in another denial when the man sprung up and came forward.

"You make 'em and I want one," said he, his face assuming suddenly a ferocious expression, while he kept outwardly cool. "You don't know me, old man, and you don't know what I know."

Popsy Vane's eyes seemed about to fly from his head.

"Look here," continued the stranger. "I'm no fool, as you will discover to your eternal sorrow if you don't deal fairly with me. I can play a hand which will be to your everlasting undoing and I will play it as certain as death if you don't sell me what I come for."

"But I tell you—"

"No lies, you miserable old wretch. You make 'quieters' and you sell them, too. Refuse to sell me one and I'll see that you don't climb the stairs any more."

"Really, sir—"

"Please don't 'sir' me. You may call me the Devil, but you needn't put on a bit of assumed politeness at this time. I may be Mephistopheles or I may be plain John Jones, but never mind who I am. I know something about the old court in Seville—"

Popsy Vane nearly leaped from his chair, and if his hands had not clutched the arms thereof he would have landed in the middle of the room in the spasm of excitement.

"You've heard of Seville, it seems," grinned the stranger. "I thought so. That's not the only arrow I carry in my quiver and I can hit the bull's-eye with every one. Now, I guess we understand each other, and if you refuse a moment longer to sell me what I want, by heavens! I'll make it hotter than Tartarus for you."

The old astrologer seemed to gasp.

His yellow, parchment-like face had turned white. His hands were quivering on the edge of the desk, and his breath came in short, horrid gasps as he stared at the merciless customer barely three feet away.

"Quick! I can't stay here all night as I've told you. You are merchant and I am customer. Let's to business. Fetch out your goods."

On one side of the little room were several closed cupboards which were locked.

Behind Old Popsy were two book-cases on whose shelves were to be found a lot of old-looking volumes whose backs denoted that they had been frequently consulted.

Popsy Vane glanced toward the closed

cupboards, and the strange man followed his look.

"Some one must have told you," the old man began when the listener impatiently interrupted him.

"Never mind that; it's immaterial. I am here and that is sufficient proof that I know. I don't care for your secret. I only want one of the little blue papers, and, what is more, I am going to stay here till I get it."

He seemed to have suddenly changed his mind, for a few moments before he had said that he could not remain there all night, and as he recalled this declaration Popsy smiled.

"I can't sell anything without a guarantee—"

"Pish!" and the handsome fellow struck the desk with his hand on which Old Popsy saw a splendid diamond ring. "I give no guarantee. I'm no chump."

"No, of course not, but—"

"The package or death! That's it. I might have kept it back, but you know now, old man. The paper or death, and you're not ready to shuffle off. Men of your stamp never are."

With another glance at his cool caller, Old Popsy arose and crossed the room.

His step was a little tottering, but it was from fright.

He was followed eagerly by the well-dressed man whose eyes got a look of wicked triumph when they saw the old man open one of the little cupboards with green glass on the door.

"That Seville business caught him," he said to himself. "It was a trump card and I knew it would fetch him if anything could. He may have a skin as tough as a rhinoceros, but the little stiletto I used punctured it."

By this time the old man had taken a small box from the cupboard and was coming back to the desk with it in his skeleton hand.

He was strangely himself again and smiled as he held it up a moment before resuming his chair.

"It's the old potion, eh?" inquired the stranger, as he bent forward as Popsy opened the box.

"Why, to be sure. Do you think I would deceive you?"

From the box was lifted a neatly-folded blue paper which was placed upon the table and Popsy Vane turned to his caller.

"Is it to be used in this city?"

"No questions, no lies," was the sententious rejoinder. "Sell me the little package and look no further."

Popsy Vane saw that he was dealing with a perfectly cool head and finally desisted.

He wrapped the package up in a plain piece of paper and passed it over to his visitor.

"How much?"

"You ought to know the price since you know so much."

One of the white hands vanished for a moment and when it came back Old Popsy's eyes fastened themselves upon it.

"All right. Here's your price. Much obliged besides. Good-night, Popsy."

Something had fallen upon the desk at the old man's hand; but it was not money.

What it was caused a pair of eyes to bulge out like swelled peas, and while the stranger with a Satanic chuckle moved toward the door, Popsy sat in a half stupor with his gaze fixed upon what had dropped before him.

He could have heard his customer tramping down-stairs for he made noise enough.

But he did not. No, he heard nothing, not even the roar of the street; he saw nothing but the one little object on the desk—three links of a gold bracelet with a blood red ruby in one of them.

"My God, I've dealt with Satan!" cried Old Popsy and immediately fell back in a faint.

CHAPTER II.

THE MURDERED MILLIONAIRE.

NEAR one of the many entrances to Central Park stands a house with a history.

The most unobserving at a glance would pronounce it the home of one to whom wealth had come, as indeed it had.

Payson Esty was a millionaire.

Almost sixty, frail of body, though strong in mind, he was a man noted in many ways.

Cooped up in the elegant house which he

had reared as a home for himself and two children—he had been a widower for years—he saw but little of the busy life of the city, and the most the neighbors saw of him was his angular figure in the Park at dusk, striding along the well-graveled walks or reclining on one of the settees with a settled look on his face.

Therefore it was a sensation when New York awoke one morning to see in the newspapers that murder had been done in the elegant house on the avenue, and that Payson Esty's millions had not saved him from the hand of the assassin.

Kill a poor devil on the docks, or find a poorly dressed body in the harbor, and the affair gets but a line in the newspaper; but kill a man with his millions, and columns are devoted to it.

It was so with the killing of Payson Esty. Those who had never seen the man devoured the accounts with morbid eagerness, and the few who really knew him read them again and again.

"Found dead in his bedroom!"

This was a favorite line in the morning journals, for the murder had been discovered before eleven at night, and the reporter had got hold of the particulars in time to dish up the usual account for the morning meal.

Payson Esty had two children, as has been said, one, and the eldest, a son named Harold, a good-looking youth of twenty, and not in good health, and the other, a daughter, Mora, very pretty, sensible, and with her mother's eyes and her courage.

It was the son who made the terrible discovery.

The millionaire had retired at ten, as was his wont.

At twenty minutes of eleven Harold went up to his father's room to see if he wanted anything—he had been complaining of late—and on opening the door he saw his father sitting in his chair, with a wild and deathly stare in his eyes.

Instantly suspecting the worst, but not for a moment thinking of murder, Harold rushed in to throw back his parent's head, to discover that he had been cut in the neck.

His shirt-front was crimsoned with his own blood, and everything, even to the son's superficial glance, told that not only murder, but robbery had been committed.

Harold, before giving the alarm, with much nerve looked through the room.

He pried everywhere, even into the drawers which had evidently been ransacked by the murderer; he searched his father's pockets and looked among his private papers which he found in an old-fashioned desk alongside the wall.

After he was through Harold gave the alarm.

Mora, thrown into a faint by the awful tidings, came back to life with more nerve than the neighbors thought she possessed.

The social position occupied by the Estys lent an additional interest to the red-handed deed.

It put two detectives in the house within an hour of the discovery, and they had given the scene of the murder an inspection thorough enough to merit the approbation of a Scotland Yarder.

The inmates of the house were questioned again and again.

Harold and his sister Mora knew nothing, and the servants declared that they had seen no stranger in the house.

Perhaps it was suicide, owing to ill-health, but the children of the millionaire scouted such an idea, and averred that the hand that had killed was not the hand of the dead man.

Harold Esty was a pale youth who did not seem to have his complement of blood. He had been away for his health, and at the time of the tragedy had not been three weeks at home.

The young man had gone away, as many knew, on not very good terms with his father; he had fallen in love with a telephone girl named Hetty Hitts, but called by many "Hetty Hello."

She was pretty, vivacious and industrious and supported a widowed mother on her earnings at the 'phone, and it was said that, owing to the girl's want of wealth, though the family was good enough, the elder Esty had had words with the son.

It was the morning after the tragedy and all Gotham had read of it in the newspapers

when the door-bell of the Esty mansion rung.

Harold went to the door himself and saw before him a man rather good looking and about thirty-five.

He looked a little Englishified, and very genteel, and Harold holding the door half way open waited for him to state his business.

The stranger pulled out a card which he extended and Harold Esty glanced at it to read:

"JACK NODDLES, DETECTIVE,
"London."

"I do not belong to the city force," explained Mr. Noddles with a bland smile. "Indeed I am not an American, as you may have guessed by my face. I belong to the London detective force and have seen a good deal of service in Scotland Yard."

Harold made a reply which assured Mr. Noddles that being an Englishman did not disparage him in his eyes.

"I am glad of that. Some of your countrymen have prejudices and I am glad you are not so bigoted. I have been informed both by the newspapers and by one of my detective friends in the city, of the terrible tragedy which has deprived you of a father. Trained to hunting my fellow-men and wrong-doers from boyhood, and loving my calling, I have called in the interest of justice, and would like to look over the ground if you have no objections."

"Let the gentleman come in, Harold, dear," said a gentle voice behind the youth, and as Jack Noddles came inside he came face to face with Mora.

"My sister, Mr. Noddles," said Harold. Jack Noddles tipped his hat and passed with the brother and sister into the parlor.

There they talked the matter over for some time when Harold volunteered to show the London detective up-stairs.

"You have had detectives here already?" said Noddles after a brief survey of the death-chamber.

"We have. They came up soon after my discovery."

"I thought so. Your detectives work peculiarly and I can see that they have been here. Would you mind letting me have the second floor to myself a few moments?"

It was a strange request and Harold seemed to hesitate.

"You shall not have anything placed in your way since you seem to take an interest in this terrible affair," he remarked. "I will go down, and you will find me in the right-hand parlor when you descend again."

Harold Esty went down and rejoined Mora in the darkened room.

"Where is the Englishman?" asked the girl.

Harold explained.

"You did not fear to trust him up there, Harold?" she said.

"Why should I, Mora? Everything of value is under lock and key and some of the most valuable things I have taken over to my own room. I do not think Mr. Noddles understands the ways of our detectives; but I am willing to let him try his hand in this matter which so interests us and the law."

Mora made no reply, but went over to the window the curtains of which she parted, half burying her figure in them and then looked out upon the street.

Harold waited nearly thirty minutes for the man up-stairs. He watched the staircase very closely and at last saw the figure of Mr. Jack Noddles upon it.

"You are very kind," said Noddles, coming into the parlor. "I have to thank you for your kindness, and, if I can, rest assured I will contribute my mite toward making clear that which just now is so dark."

Brother and sister followed the London detective to the door and in another moment Noddles was walking toward the Park with rapid strides. He vanished among the early shadows there almost before Harold closed the door.

The afternoon editions had but little additional news about the murder of the Avenue.

Some facts concerning Payson Esty's life were brought to the front, and with a few speculations, such as are generally indulged

in on the occasion of a mysterious crime, were made, and the reader turned to something else—the races or the recent fall in stocks.

Night seemed to fall earlier than common.

The body of the dead millionaire, over which a brief inquest had been held, lay in the library near his books and the house itself seemed as dark as a dungeon.

The authorities had taken the whole matter in hand and several detectives watched the mansion.

At eight o'clock the front door opened and a figure came out. It paused a moment on the stoop, long enough for its owner to draw on a pair of black gloves, after which it started nimbly off and turned the first corner.

One of the men on guard knew that this person was Harold Esty, the dead man's son.

His slender figure was faultlessly clad as it ever was, and any person who had ever seen him would have recognized him even under the lamps of New York.

One of the men on guard followed the youth.

Whether or not he was suspected of anything, he was watched like a hawk, and Harold, unaware of this espionage, kept on until he took a car which bore him down-town.

The man at his heels followed into the next car on the same train and kept him in sight.

Harold buried himself behind a newspaper which he opened as soon as he entered the car, and after riding for half an hour he folded the sheet, alighted and started off again.

Unintentionally and unknowingly he lost his tracker or rather the hunter lost his quarry.

Dodging in and out of the crowds that covered the pavements, young Esty made his way to a street in the near vicinity of Broadway and ran into an open hallway.

It was a strange place for a millionaire's son to be in, but he had business there, for he bounded up the stairs that presented itself and rapped at a certain door in the dim light of a corridor.

"Harold!" cried a girl who opened the door and then fell back with his name repeated on her lips.

He entered and turned upon her as she shut the door.

"I have come at last—at last, Hetty. You have heard—"

He stopped as if he could not trust his nerves further.

"I could not help it, Harold," said she. "It came to me like the bursting of a thunderbolt. I was at the 'phone in the office when Mr. Besant was called up, and the person who called him, eager to tell him what had happened, told the secret—it was a secret then—to me. I never was so shocked in my life. Your father?"

Harold Esty said nothing for a moment. He looked beyond the telephone girl to the door and then back again.

"They have put detectives on the trail, haven't they?" asked Hetty.

"Of course, but the whole thing is so mysterious—so terribly involved in clouds. You see there is no clue—none at all."

"But they must find one," exclaimed Hetty Hitts, laying her hand on the young man's knee.

"Of course they will try."

"They must succeed, I say. They must not stop till they have the threads in their hands. Who have they employed?"

"I don't know. They came from the city force."

"You had no choice, then?"

"None."

"Then, you shall have, Harold. There is one man whom you must see. You may know him. I do. You won't like him as a man, but he is a power: he never fails. He is a queer man—a living mystery, as deep as any the detectives encounter. You must go to this man—my friend; you must employ Orson Owlet, the Detective. You must go to-night."

CHAPTER III.

CHARGED WITH THE CRIME.

HAROLD ESTY looked at Hetty like one amazed.

Her words had been uttered in a tone of command and he looked at the fair girl as if to say: "You seem to think that I have

no rights since you order thus." But he presently said:

"When did you meet this man?"

"It is a long story and I want you to see him as soon as possible," was the reply.

"Orson Owlet? I never heard of him."

"That is not strange. What have you done that you should meet detectives? You have never had any use for them till now, and now you need this very man."

"Where does he live?"

Hetty took a card from the drawer of her little work-table and handed it to him.

"Here is his address. You are familiar with the city and won't have any trouble finding him."

"Why is he called the Detective, Hetty?"

"He is supposed to know everything about crime and go straight to the mark, as if he possessed supernatural powers."

"Is he an old man?"

"Rather, but as active as a young tiger-cat."

"I will see him, Hetty."

"It must be to-night—now. You must lose no time. The hand that struck the blow in the little bed-chamber of your home must be tracked at once, and by just such a tireless man as Orson Owlet. You may not like him; he is very queer and strange. He isn't liked by any one, yet he becomes a friend as true as steel. You may trust Orson Owlet. You may tell him the very secrets of your soul, knowing that they will be as safe in his keeping as in your own. Go to him, Harold. I will not keep you here a moment longer."

Thus almost forced from his sweetheart's presence, Harold Esty found himself once more on the streets.

"Orson Owlet?" he thought. "It's a queer name, and Hetty gives me to understand that its owner is just as queer. I never heard of him, though I have seen the names of a good many men connected with the detective police of New York. He may not be so connected—a ferret on his own hook—and this may account for my not knowing anything about him."

He did not have to glance at the card again, for he had made a mental note of the address, but he took a car and was landed in a little side street near Broadway, down which he made his way to a plain building.

The number was above the door which stood open in the hallway.

Harold seemed to hesitate in the semi-darkness, but when he recalled his promise to "Hetty Hello" he went up the stairs and rapped at a door bearing the number 11.

"Come in," said a voice, and Harold opened the door, walking in with firm step, and his curiosity on the alert.

"Shut the door, please, and lock it. You will find the key in the lock."

Somewhat startled, the dead millionaire's son did so and turned to the center of the room.

It was not a large room; the furniture was scant, but still sufficient. A table stood near the middle of the apartment, and there stood—not sat—the man who had told him to lock the door.

"This must be Orson Owlet," thought Harold, with a close look at the man.

He was confirmed in his opinion the next moment by the man, who continued:

"Sit down, Mr. Esty. I will be ready to talk to you in a moment."

A strange thrill passed over the young man's nerves.

The tall, strange man with the smooth, sallow face and deep-set eyes of jet blackness had called him by name.

However, Harold took the chair nearest the table, while the other person crossed the room and opened a little cupboard set in the wall. With a small packet in his hand, he came back to the table, walking over the carpetless floor without noise, and a moment later he was on the other side of the table, looking across it into Harold's face, speechless and breathless.

"You have come to see me on business?" Orson Owlet said at last.

Harold replied in the affirmative and with a monosyllable.

"You have come to consult me in regard to what happened at your house last night. I have been expecting you."

"Expecting me?" cried Harold, falling back. "Then, Hetty—"

He thought a smile came for a moment to the detective's lips, but it must have been a delusion, for it did not remain there.

"Really, I don't see how you could be expecting me when I never made up my mind to see you till a few minutes ago."

"Of course not, but I knew you were coming. Now that you are here we will talk. You locked the door of course? That was all right. You have just come downtown?"

Harold nodded.

Orson Owlet, who looked like a man a trifle past fifty, though it was difficult to tell his exact age on account of his dark face and black hair, let one of his long hands rest on the edge of the table while he seemed to get ready to question Harold.

The dead man's son expected a regular catechism on the subject of the tragedy and he had come prepared to tell Old Owlet much.

But instead of the expected inquisition came a question which made Harold smile: "Did young Mr. Bloodgood ever return that loan?"

Harold Esty gazed at Orson Owlet like a man in a dream.

What had the question to do with the important one of Who killed the millionaire of the Avenue?

Chuncy Bloodgood, a young swell, had borrowed twenty dollars of him at a seaside resort nearly three years before, and here Old Owlet—Hetty's never failing detective—was asking him about the almost forgotten affair.

"No, sir; he never thought of it afterward, I guess," said Harold. "I have quite lost sight of Chuncy Bloodgood and long ago put that amount down in the loss column."

"I thought so. Well, you did right, young man. Mr. Bloodgood will continue to owe you; indeed, he was buried with your account in his pocket."

"Buried?" exclaimed Harold.

"Yes. I thought you did not know it. He changed his name, as he had too many constables running after him, and he got out of the world to get beyond their clutches. But now we'll proceed. You may tell your story."

Harold saw Orson Owlet lean back in his chair and partially close his dark, expressive eyes.

"Begin at the beginning and tell me all. I have the whole night for you. I don't know how much time you can devote to me."

Hetty had spoken truly; this was a queer man. Not only this, but he had ways which he (Harold, did not like. He did not believe that he could ever wholly trust Orson Owlet, however good a detective he might be. He might find a clew where the best ferrets had failed, but his dark face, so like a mummy's his almost buried eyes and his long, thin hands—those were the things Harold did not, could not like.

Harold talked uninterruptedly for five minutes. In that time he went over the events as he could narrate them. He told about the finding of his father's dead body in the arm-chair; his fright thereat and his removal of the most valuable documents to his own chamber where they then were safe from all evil-minded persons.

Old Owlet listened without a word.

"Now about the quarrel?" said the detective.

"The—the quarrel?"

"Yes, the tiff you had with your father before you went off over the girl."

Harold flushed.

"It wasn't much and I was forgiven on my return. In fact I received a letter from him asking me to come back."

"You have that letter, have you?"

"I have."

"And the one you got from the girl letting you know that your father had a sick spell in the Park the other night?"

"That letter—Hetty's—more than anything else hastened my return," said Harold.

Then before Old Owlet could speak again the young man asked:

"Do you know this man?" and he tossed upon the table the card he had received from Jack Noddles the London detective at the door of his home.

One of the long, dark hands pounced up-

on it with the avidity of a vulture and it was lifted to the sphinx-like face.

"Was this presented in person?" came over the card.

"Yes, that is, a person who called himself Jack Noddles, gave it to me."

Orson Owlet's face seemed to change color a little.

He looked at the card again and threw it upon the table then arose and crossed the room to the little cupboard in the wall.

Harold watched him as he fumbled in it a few seconds, at the end of which time he withdrew his hand with a lot of scraps of paper in his grasp.

Without speaking to Harold, Owlet came back to the table and silently went through what he had captured in the wall cupboard. He busied himself at this ten minutes, during which time a dead silence reigned in the room, and even when he raised his head it was not broken.

"I wish you would help us," said Harold. "I want you to hunt for the hand that slew my father."

"Yes, yes."

"Hetty, to be honest, suggested that I come to you. You know Hetty?"

"The little girl who takes care of the 'phone?' the man's face seemed to be illumined with a sudden smile. "Yes, I know Hetty. We are friends. She suggested it, eh?"

"She did."

"You would not have come here if she had not mentioned me?"

"I did not know you—that is I did not know where you were."

Harold did not like to admit that he had never heard of Orson Owlet, the Detective.

"I will see that you lose nothing by your work whether you succeed or not," he went on. "I promise you that you shall be my representative in all the phases of this sad affair, and if you should not bring the guilty to justice—for all acknowledge that it is a very deep and dark mystery—why—"

The young man stopped and grew pale. The eyes of the old detective were fastened upon him, and he may have gone too far.

"There! I will see what can be done, Mr. Esty. You can go back now."

Harold arose without more ado and threw a swift look toward the door.

"You must put up with what comes, whether good or bad," continued Old Owlet. "You must take things as they come, I say. Good-night."

Was that all? Was this the way he had of making bargains—of undertaking the great criminal cases in which he had engaged so often?

Still holding the gathered scraps in one of his hands, Orson Owlet conducted his visitor to the door and unlocked it.

Their faces were very close together as Harold crossed the threshold and it seemed to him that the deeply buried eyes pierced him like an arrow.

"I don't believe Hetty knows anything about this man," he said to himself midway on the steps leading to the street. "I would like to know into whose hands I have placed myself. He looks like a madman. What do the regular detectives think of him? Do they recognize him at all?"

He was on the sidewalk now and with nothing more before him for the night, he hurried home.

To-morrow his father was to be buried and after that—he dared not think of what might follow.

He was on the step and the latch-key was in his hand when a footstep sounded behind him. He turned at once and saw a man mount the steps.

"You need not enter the house, Mr. Esty," said this man. "We have a carriage just around the corner. You are under arrest. You are charged with taking your father's life."

Harold staggered from the man who, thinking that he intended to open the door and rush into the house, sprung after him and his hand closed on his arm.

The young man with more strength than he gave outward evidence of, shook him loose and turned upon him with the suddenly roused fury of a lion.

"You don't know what you've said," he cried. "That's a bold charge and I resent it now!"

The following moment there sprung out from behind the nearest tree another man who came up the steps at a single bound.

Harold was brought to bay against the very door of his own home and the hands of the two men gripped his arms like a brace of vises.

"Come; don't give us trouble. It will look bad, you know. It will prejudice people against your case," said one.

Harold Esty dropped his uplifted hands at once.

At the same time he heard a suppressed cry inside the house and then a key turned in the door.

"Come," said one of the officers to his companion. "It is the girl and we don't want a scene here. It can come later," and Harold was escorted down the steps as Mora's figure came into view.

Then he heard a loud cry, but did not turn his head as he was marched toward the nearest corner.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SEALED SECRET.

THE mysterious death of the millionaire occurred within seven days after Popsy Vane's interview with the strange man who forced from him what he called a "quieter."

The leathery-faced old man still occupied the little room where he had lived for many years, working his spells and making money by the practice of what is known as the "black art."

It was his business to make money, and as no one ever cared to look into his past, he was left alone so far as the public and the authorities were concerned.

More than once he had recalled the startling scene between him and the cool visitor.

Who was he and, how did he know so much?

Old Popsy had for proof that he had been visited the three links of the bracelet with ruby setting, and he now and then took them from their hiding-place and looked at them, but always behind locked doors.

Frightened somewhat by the visit of the handsome cool-head, Popsy had done another thing which he could put down on the side of caution.

He removed the blue papers from the little cupboard in the wall and alone in the room one night, he destroyed every one, carefully raking together the ashes and burning them over in the grate.

After this he fell to looking at the newspapers, something he had never been guilty of before.

He went over the death columns and found out where the violent ones were reported, and these he looked up with a great deal of care.

Old Popsy was evidently trying to find out if the "quieter" had been put to work and if so, upon whom?

He alighted one morning on the murder of Payson Esty, the millionaire, and read it through, but seemingly with no great degree of interest.

The night after the murder the old man was alone in his room. His strange visitor had not come back and he was hoping that perhaps he had seen the last of him.

He remembered his fine face and dark eyes; he recalled his admirable poise of figure as he threatened him, and even seemed to hear the tones in which he had mentioned the name of the old Spanish city—Seville.

Popsy Vane heard a footstep in the corridor outside and it approached his door. There it stopped and he looked toward the portal as he waited for the knock.

By and by it came, a little nervous like—three raps in succession.

The old man opened the door in person.

The light of his lamp fell upon the figure of a woman and Popsy Vane fell back with a puzzled countenance.

"You are alone?" said the female, entering, with a veil over her face. "I am glad of that; have been lurking like a thief downstairs for I was almost sure I heard some one up here."

"No one has been here, madam," replied Popsy, trying to get a look beneath the veil which he could not do. "I have been alone for an hour."

"No one came here awhile ago? That's queer."

"You may have heard some one in another part of the building. I'm not the only tenant."

"Of course not. You'd have a great deal of room if you were. He came bustling down and put on his shoes at the foot of the stairs—at least I thought he did."

Old Popsy started.

"Put on his shoes?" he echoed. "What was he like?"

"Short, but as quick as a cat, and you may be sure that I didn't let him see me—not for the world."

"It's strange, yet not so very strange," answered the old man after a brief pause.

"We have some odd characters in this building, and I don't pretend to know much about any of them. You have come to see me, madam?"

"Would I be here if I hadn't? I guess I'll remove this if you can assure me that we are not observed."

The thin, dark hand of the old astrologer was waved toward the door.

"Perfectly safe," said he. "Sit down."

The following moment the woman threw back her veil, revealing a singular face midway between good looks and homeliness. It was the face of a woman past thirty, yet still this side the fortieth mile-stone.

Her hands were gloved, yet Popsy could see that the wrists were delicate and very white.

"Do you cast a horoscope if the person is not present?" she asked.

"I try to, madame."

"I can give you the points. I have his name, date of birth and so on."

"It's a little better to have the subject here, but if that is impossible, why, I proceed without him."

"That's good. In this instance it's absolutely impossible to have the subject here," she smiled as she spoke. "Do you want the data written out?"

"You are going to wait for the horoscope, are you?"

"Oh, yes. Will it take long?"

"An hour, perhaps."

"I'll wait, of course."

She reached across the table and drew toward her a writing pad; then she leaned over it and began to write, Old Popsy looking on with a good deal of interest.

He waited for her to conclude her work, after which he took possession of what she had written and examined it in the light of his shaded lamp.

"You know this man?" he said, without looking up.

"I want to know what is to become of him and where he is just now."

"I'm no trailer, woman."

"Then they lie on you," and the lips of the speaker came together with emphasis.

"That's not strange. This man is not your friend."

She smiled again.

"He is dangerous to you and you fear him."

No answer.

Old Popsy's hand was running back and forth over the lines which had been traced on the sheet.

"You have a right to fear this man. So has every evil doer."

Her lips fell apart in a slight gasp and her eyes became riveted upon the old man.

"You can go on," she said, steadying herself by catching hold of the table. "I am prepared to hear anything."

Popsy Vane looked up, the first time he had done so since taking possession of the paper.

"This man is very near you."

"In New York?"

"In New York."

"Who is he and what is he? Where is he to be found, and does he live alone?"

Old Popsy seemed to retreat within himself like the head of a turtle.

"You and your friends don't want to cross this man's path—not while the present planet rules the earth. You must keep in the back-ground."

"Then, you think he knows—"

She checked herself and seemed to fall back from the table. Her gloved hand left the oilcloth, and she looked across it at the old man on the other side.

"But where is he? Tell me this and I'll do the rest. Show me where this man lives

and I'll see that he becomes less dangerous. What is he now?"

"You know what he has been."

"Yes, yes; I know."

"Madame, there are secrets of the stars, which cannot be revealed within these walls," answered Old Popsy, solemnly. "I dare not break the compact I made with the powers of the other world. You cannot know what this compact was, and I cannot tell you."

"But the whereabouts of this man? You have not finished his horoscope, but you have gone far enough in that direction. You say that he is in this city, but you stop there—right at the most important part. It is cruel. I came here to find out something about him, but you torture me."

"You can avoid him."

"But I want to know how to do this. I must be forearmed. You don't want me to run against him unawares?"

"No, but his name and what he is must remain the secret of the stars."

Old Popsy's visitor bit her lip till it reddened.

"If you cannot reveal the secret in this room, seal it up for me," she went on. "Surely that would not be breaking the compact."

"You are ingenious," smiled the old man. "You are bound to wrest the secret from me."

"I must have it!"

Popsy Vane opened a drawer and took out a little envelope almost as thick as paste board. From this, in turn, he drew a card, upon which he wrote a moment, narrowly watched by his caller.

"It shall be as you say. You will not open this until you get home—"

"You shall be obeyed to the letter. It shall not be opened till I am home."

The envelope had been sealed and a drop of green wax glistened on the white surface.

"Thanks. What do I owe you?"

Old Popsy leaned across the table, his deep-set eyes fastened upon her.

"Not a dollar, madame. I don't rob women like you."

"Women like me?" she exclaimed half indignantly. "You don't mean to insinuate—"

"Bless you, no," put in Popsy Vane. "Last of all would I rob you, you see."

"Very well," she did not seem to care to press him for his reasons. "You will hear from me again, perhaps. The secret is safe. Not to be opened till I am at home? Consider it safe, please."

She arose and opened the door, watched by the old man with his serpent-like eyes.

In another moment she was gone and the astrologer was alone once more in the little room. It was as still as death now and in the silence he heard the pit-a-pat of his visitor's feet on the stairs.

As for the woman, she reached the street with the sealed secret in her bosom. She looked carefully around her and started off. No one had seen her, for which she was thankful, and in a little while she was a long distance from the old man's haunt.

"I told him that I would be successful," she said half aloud to herself. "I was sure that I could get it out of him if he really knew his art. It is our secret at last, and if this man is in the city, as Popsy says, we will find him!"

Ten minutes later she let herself into a house with the aid of a latch-key, and passing through a hall she opened a door and stood face to face with a man who had just left a chair.

"See! I have it!" she exclaimed, snatching forth the sealed secret and holding it up to his gaze. "I told you that I would wrest it from the old man if he held it, and here it is!"

"He has sealed it in one of his mystery envelopes, has he?"

"Yes; he would give it to me no other way. Where is Jack?"

"He is out."

"And Harvey?"

"Out, too; but break the seal and see what the old humbug says."

It took a knife to open the thick envelope and the woman with her eyes apparently on fire unfolded the paper found inside.

The man, who was handsome, with a full

black beard of silken softness, looked over her shoulder.

"That man our man?" he cried with a glance. "Impossible!"

"Old Popsy Vane, the mysterious, says so. If he is Dunbar Vivier and takes the trail all is lost!" and the two in silence read and re-read the name Old Popsy Vane had traced on the magic paper:

"ORSON OWLET, *Shadower*,

"119 R—street, City."

"I won't believe it yet!" cried the black-bearded man.

CHAPTER V.

A BOLT FROM THE BLUE.

THE arrest of Harold Esty spread like wild-fire.

It was in the nature of a surprise to the city, and, coming as it did on the heels of the tragedy of the Avenue, it possessed a startling interest for all who heard it.

Old Owlet heard of it in an unexpected manner, for within an hour of its occurrence he was startled to see Hetty Hitts the telephone girl at his door.

Her face was white and her eyes showed traces of the excitement that controlled her. She sprang into the room and to the table where the old ferret sat.

"He saw you, didn't he?" she cried. "He engaged you to work upon the dark case and now they have arrested him!"

"Mr. Harold Esty?" quickly asked Owlet.

"Harold! They have him in the toils and it is an outrage! He was almost home—in fact, was on the steps—when they seized him. He sent me word—it's a wonder they let him do it—but he sent me word of his arrest—"

"And told you to come to me, eh?"

"No," answered Hetty, somewhat quieter. "He knew I would do that anyhow."

Orson Owlet sat unperturbed in his chair and studied the pretty and intelligent face before him.

"You don't for a moment believe him guilty?" she cried out, disturbed by his silence. "It is impossible!"

"What does he say?"

"I have heard nothing."

"But he sent you a note?" and the dark hand of the old ferret came across the table for the letter.

"It was very brief," responded Hetty, drawing a crumpled note from her pocket. "You see they must have cut off his time or he would have written more."

Old Owlet took the note, straightened it out, and read:

"HETTY:—

"I have been arrested for that dreadful crime. Don't let it trouble you.

"HAROLD."

"It is brief, sure enough," smiled the detective, looking up again. "In fact, it couldn't be shorter. Still, he might have said—"

"That he was not guilty?" put in the girl with a shudder. "No use for him to do that when he never committed the crime. I wouldn't believe it, no matter what he might have written."

"Who brought the note to you?"

"A messenger belonging to the detective force."

The note was thrown back upon the table and Hetty picked it up.

"It's a conspiracy!" she exclaimed, with a flashing of her deep, dark eyes. "He is in the toils, thrown there by some one who wants to ruin both of us. All this is plain to me."

To this opinion Orson Owlet said nothing, but merely passed his hand across the tablecloth smoothing out a wrinkle which Hetty's sharp eyes had not seen.

"You're my friend, Mr. Owlet?" said the girl.

"Certainly. You know that without asking, Hetty."

"I told Harold so, and that is why he came to you. We are going to rely on you."

The old man for a moment made no reply; but was watched by Hetty in silence for a few seconds.

"Girl, there must be some reason for this arrest. Do you think they would take him without suspicion?"

She started with a slight scream.

"You can't mean that! No, you can't insinuate that they can have good grounds for arresting Harold for the death of his own father."

"There was a quarrel, Hetty."

"Over me? I know that. He told me all about it and showed me his father's letter in which he was asked to come home. Oh, that little difficulty was settled before Harold came back."

"But they may not know of the settlement."

Hetty seemed to reflect a moment, then her face brightened.

"That is true—they may not have heard of it. But if that is all Harold will clear away the clouds in a little while for he has his father's letter. That would do it, you see."

Orson Owlet slightly inclined his head.

"I am sure of it," continued Hetty, chatingly. "Why, bless you, Mr. Owlet, Harold will clear away every sign of suspicion and he will then turn on the villains who have him in their net for the time being. Of course you will take the trail as he has engaged you, while he proves his complete innocence at the preliminary hearing. When will that take place?"

"Probably to-day," was the reply.

"It must. Harold shall not linger behind the bars like a common criminal. I do not feel like going on duty this morning, but I will have to take my place at the phone just as if nothing had happened."

"You have not seen Miss Mora, his sister?"

"No," with a start. "I will see her, though, for she must be distressed over this new trouble. Now, Mr. Owlet, we will look to you for help. You told me once—it was after I had done the little favor, you know—they found you on the street near my boarding-house—that I could call on you at any time for assistance. I have never needed any till now and both Harold and I need it very much."

"I shall keep that promise," said Orson Owlet, with some show of feeling which, as a rule, was foreign to his nature. "Your employers should let you off to-day, but I dare say they will not."

"I shall not ask them to," returned the girl with a slight toss of her head as she went to the door. "We shall have good news from Harold before night."

"I don't know about that," ejaculated Old Owlet as the door closed on Hetty Hitts's trim figure and he heard her boots on the stairs. "If I am not mistaken, this is but one of the clouds now in the sky, and the blue may be lost entirely before the storm blows over."

He went back to his table while Hetty Hello proceeded toward her station, passing through the sunlight of the city jostled here and there by those who did not know her.

"That's the girl," whispered one of two men who had seen Hetty emerge from the hallway leading to Orson Owlet's rooms.

"You won't lose her, Harvey?"

"Not for a moment," was the reply and the next moment the man called Harvey started after Hetty whom he kept in sight, no matter how many corners she turned nor how fast she tripped along.

"Harvey" was a man blessed with good looks and a trim, neat figure, well-clad in the latest fashions. His face was ruddy in color and a black mustache set jauntily underneath his nose, while his eyes seemed to sparkle with eagerness as they took in every thing along the street.

He tracked "Hetty Hello" to the little office in which she took care of the telephone, answering all sorts of messages in the course of the day and sometimes—for extra pay—far into the night.

Her employers were brokers who did a large business near Wall street and Hetty knew as much about the rise and fall of stocks, bulls and bears, puts and calls as the best informed broker in the city.

"Harvey," curling his well oiled mustache, had turned back from the office after seeing Hetty's figure through a window as she hung up her hat for the day.

The sport eyed her a moment with a sharp

expression, turned quickly and went back over the same ground.

"We know where she nests during the day and that's something," he remarked to himself. "Now we can go to work and play the other cards. I'll go back and see how the Captain's coming on and whether Carmel has succeeded in doing anything."

He half crossed the city to run up a number of steps and to enter a certain house with a pass-key.

As he entered a parlor he threw his hat across the room and dropped upon a sofa covered with crimson plush.

"So you're back," said a voice as the door swung wide and a woman came in. "You weren't here to hear my report."

"No. I've just come in. What did you do?"

"I found out something. Look at this!"

A card was flipped toward him and he clutched it as it fell into his lap.

"You don't mean to tell me that this is the old bloodhound—the man we've lost?" he cried, looking over the card at the woman who stood motionless in the middle of the room.

"That is the news I brought home."

"From the leather-faced man of mystery? It's a wonder he told you."

"But he did, for you hold in your hand the very card he gave me. Popsy Vane, the old charlatan, gave me that name and assured me that the stars—"

"To Tartarus with such rigmarole!" put in the cool sport. "I don't take much stock in all this. But if he is in the city—if that is the right man and he a detective—with all his wits at work, why, the sooner we know it the better, Carmel, eh?"

"I told Boyd so."

"By the way, where is Boyd?"

Harvey Hawk—such was the man's name—sent a swift glance round the room.

"He may be in soon, or we may not see him again till after dark. You have heard of the arrest?"

"All New York knows that now. I saw Jack besides and got it fresh from him."

"Yes, from Jack. He is as cool as ever and plays his part well. There is only one man capable of beating him at his game."

"Orson Owlet?" asked Harvey, glancing at the card which he still held in his hand.

The imperious-looking woman nodded.

Harvey drew a chair up to the elegant table in the middle of the room, lifted an ornamented pipe from the mantel filled it and began to smoke.

He elevated his heels upon the cloth and blew smoke-rings toward the ceiling, while the woman, probably used to such actions, turned away and left him to himself.

"The girl's deuced pretty," mused the smoker. "I wonder where the young chap picked her up. Got as trim a figure as ever I saw and a step as light as a gazelle's. She stands by him, no doubt. I believe she's the prettier of the two, but Great Caesar! she hasn't got the money the other one has. That office work will soon finish her, but perhaps the young man thought to take her out soon, now that the old gentleman is out of the way. Jack says he said but little, but went with them as quiet as a lamb. Ah, give me Jack for a game like that; now, if this shadow doesn't interfere—By heavens! he shall not. That will never do. Orson Owlet, eh? That's not the name he used to bear; neither is "Popsy Vane" the cognomen its present wearer used to rejoice in."

The handsome occupant of the parlor laughed in almost boisterous tones and that when no one was near to him, and then he fell to smoking quietly and in seeming meditation.

At almost the same hour in another part of the city Hetty Hitts, thinking over the startling events of the last few hours, heard the call on the telephone and went over to attend to it.

"Hello?" came through the phone. "Is that Barlow & Barlow's office?"

"Yes," answered the girl. "Do you want to see Mr. Barlow?"

"Not particular. It's Stickney that's talking—at the Club. I have a bit of news for him. Is it his phone girl?"

"If you please, sir?"

"All right. There's another startling turn in the Esty murder case. Thought he would like to hear of it."

Hetty Hello held her breath.

"I'm listening," she said at last.

"Very well. Beg pardon; a friend wanted to talk to me a moment. The young man—Harold Esty, who was arrested last night for the crime—absolutely refuses to answer two questions. He admits now that he quarreled with his father about a girl—not socially his equal—but cannot produce the letters which he says his father wrote him forgiving him. Then, he utterly refuses to explain away—if he can—the presence of the dagger which was found in his room this morning."

Hetty Hitts heard no more; she staggered back from the instrument with a terrified cry and sunk limp and white into her chair.

The telephone message was like a bolt from the blue.

CHAPTER VI.

OLD OWLET'S BY-PLAY.

THE startling telephone message was correct; Harold Esty had utterly refused to explain, if he could, the presence of a dagger concealed in his room.

It had been discovered there since the murder by a man who had searched the house, and this was none other than Jack Noddles, the London Detective.

The New York ferrets were somewhat chagrined over the Briton's find though they admitted that they had not given the young man's room a very thorough search.

The dagger had been found at the bottom of a drawer in the bureau, deftly concealed underneath a lot of linen on which several minute blood-spots were to be seen.

The dagger and the stained linen had been taken to the station where Jack Noddles handed everything over to the authorities, saying that, being in America and with some time on his hands, he had become interested in the Avenue crime and had undertaken to see if a clew could be found.

Harold seemed dumfounded over the terrible discovery, and when shown the dagger on which were stains like dried gore he refused, as has been said, to even try to explain how it came in the drawer.

Mora, thunderstruck by the find, declared that she had never seen such a weapon in her brother's possession, and went so far as to say she did not believe that the blade belonged to Harold.

"You quarreled with your father over a girl?" said the inspector to Harold.

"I did," was the prompt confession.

"It was a show of passion on each side, wasn't it?"

"We had hot words; perhaps I said the most."

"Well?"

"Father wrote me to come home, saying that we should not fall out over such things, and I returned the day after receiving that letter."

"Which you have, no doubt?"

"It is in my room under lock and key."

Harold willingly furnished the key and an officer was sent after the letter.

An hour later the officer returned, saying that he had opened the drawer said to contain the communication and had searched it thoroughly without finding it.

Harold heard this news with a start.

He turned pale a moment and then his face flushed like a person about to resent a wrong; but he said nothing.

"The letter, as you have heard Mr. Martin say, cannot be found. Is it possible that your sister Mora has it?"

"It is impossible," exclaimed Harold. "My sister does not look through my private papers."

"Are you sure that you placed it in the drawer which Mr. Martin searched?"

"It was there the last time I saw it."

The inspector reflected a moment and then turned to Harold again.

"Do you deny that you owned the dagger which was found in the bureau?" he asked.

"I refuse to answer such questions. I refuse to pay the least attention to them."

It was from this reply that the gentleman who had called up Hetty Hitts, in the office of Barlow & Barlow, sent over the line the message which had felled the girl like the blow of a clinched fist.

Jack Noddles turned from the prisoner

and walked across the little room of the station.

The London Detective seemed to have a far-away look of satisfaction in his eye, and he did not look around again until after Harold had been led away.

"Mr. Noddles," said the inspector, "you are going to remain in the city till after the conclusion of this investigation, aren't you?"

"I feel it a duty to remain," replied Jack. "I am wanted across the water, but I shall not go as long as this matter is unsettled. While I believe that I have struck the right trail, I am aware that people have been the victims of conspiracies; but the way this thing looks, the young man yonder is in a very bad box."

The inspector made no reply, and Noddles walked out of the building.

He had barely reached the sidewalk when a man who had been standing in the shadow of the police station came into view and followed him.

He was a person evidently about fifty, with a short, grayish beard, a quick step and a good eye.

If he had been waiting for Jack Noddles to emerge from the station he did not reveal it by his look. He seemed to have been lounging in the neighborhood, waiting for a job of some kind, and tracking genteel Jack Noddles seemed to be just the thing.

Jack, whistling a low air, started off, and was followed some distance by the man, who kept him in sight all the time. He was a good tracker, knew just how to avoid being seen, and when Jack entered a quiet place some six squares from Mulberry street he was still watched.

The London Detective remained about ten minutes in the building when he came out in a different suit and walked off again.

He wasn't followed this time.

The man who had watched him came up to the entrance of the building, and saw on the inside of the hall, and just above the foot of the staircase the sign: "Lodgings for Single Gentlemen."

Up the stairs he went and knocked at a door upon which the sign was duplicated.

A middle aged woman with a cap on her head stood in the doorway and the caller said at once:

"You rent rooms to single gentlemen, I see."

"That is when we have them to rent. Sometimes, you understand, we are full and can't accommodate our callers."

"Of course. How are you fixed now?"

"I have one empty room. It was vacated day before yesterday. The gentleman who had it has left the city and I have it for the next renter."

"Can I see it?"

Certainly; Mrs. Larrigan would be too glad to show the room, as it was one of the best on the premises, and accordingly she conducted her would-be patron to it.

It was a nice, light and airy room on the next floor, and the price was not extortionate. The gentleman looked it over, made a few remarks about the neat condition, saying that the last renter was not hard on property, which the landlady graciously confirmed, and ended by taking the apartment.

He gave his name as Cyrus Delafield, and said in an off-hand manner that he was doing business on Eighth avenue and that he wanted a room where he would not be disturbed at night.

"When will you begin?" asked Mrs. Larrigan.

"To night. You have all quiet lodgers, I hope."

"All are respectable people."

"No musical prodigies or anything of that kind?"

"No, sir. The gentleman beneath you is an Englishman who sometimes plays the flute, but in a low, meditative key which I am sure will not disturb you."

"No, of course not. I like music which is not pitched in an ear-splitting key, and I can play the flute a little myself."

"That is good."

"The gentleman is English, I believe you said?"

"At least I think so. I came from the South of England myself, though my name would indicate that I have Irish blood in my veins, which I confess to; and I think I can pick out my countrymen every time. Mr.

Costerman, I am quite sure, is an Englishman though I have never asked him. He isn't here every night, as he explained he would not be when he took the room. Sometimes he is out of the city for days at a time, but he pays all the same and never asks for a reduction on the ground of absence."

Cyrus Delafield made no further inquiries concerning the man on the lower floor but bade Mrs. Larrigan good-by and went out repeating the information that he would in all probability take possession of the room that night.

Mrs. Larrigan, delighted, returned to her room and gave the new roomer credit for ten dollars of advance rent while Cyrus Delafield, striding over the warm pavements of Gotham, plunged into another part of the city.

He landed in Orson Owlet's room where he drew a chair up to the table after which he quietly removed the beard he wore, returning to his old face with its strange lines and dark colors.

He made an entry in a little book which he took from his pocket and then placed in a small cupboard in the wall which he had revealed by the simple task of touching a button.

"Old Owlet, the Detective, was playing a quiet hand all his own, and for some time he sat looking out the window and down upon the busy street like a man absorbed in reflection."

Was he waiting for night so as to go back and carry out his promise with his new landlady? Was he eager to enact still further the role of Cyrus Delafield? or was he secretly rejoicing over the success of the game he had inaugurated that day?

His face revealed nothing; it never did; it was the face of the Sphinx so far as revelation went, and this strange man whom few knew and with whom no one was on intimate terms, kept his secret with the greatest care.

Perhaps he knew that Harold Esty had refused to tell the story of the dagger; that the letter which he had said had been placed in the drawer could not be found; but whether he knew or not, he gave forth no sign.

Hetty Hitts, rendered nervous by the shock of the message intended for her employer's ears, did not come to see Orson Owlet again that day.

If she had called she would have found the old detective at home; but she went home from the office soon after her faint and remained there with her mother.

Mother and daughter had no secrets from each other. Hetty told her all about the message, adding that Harold was the victim of a conspiracy, but immediately brightening up as she added that Orson Owlet would find it out if any one could.

"I would like to call on Mora, but I dare not," said the girl. "We have never met, and you know, mother, that I am, in part, the innocent cause of Harold's misfortunes. That quarrel between father and son, and all on my account, has helped to place him where he is and Mora may hold resentment against me. I would like to go to her and it really is my duty so to do; but I cannot—not now at least."

Night came, finding Hetty at the window looking out abstractedly with her mother covertly and sympathetically regarding her, her only child.

All at once the telephone girl sprang up and fell back from the window with a cry.

Mrs. Hitts rushed across the room, believing that Hetty was about to faint, but she steadied herself and even smiled as her mother came up.

"It was that man again!" said she.

"What man, child?"

"I did not tell you, did I? Well, this morning I saw a man looking up at me from the street. Something then seemed to tell me that he must have followed me to the office and perhaps from the detective's room. He is dressed exactly as he was this morning, and when I saw him just now he seemed to have singled me out again."

"Where is he?" and Hetty's mother went to the window and parted the curtains.

"He may be gone now," said the girl. "But he was looking straight at me like an enemy. Such eyes!—I could see them even by the light of the lamp out there. You don't see him, mother?"

"No, child."

Hetty took a long breath of absolute relief and went back to the window herself.

"He is gone now. He was right out there. Mother, that man means evil and he may be against Harold and me."

"You must be on the lookout when you go back to the 'phone to-morrow."

The telephone girl shuddered as she dropped the curtain and came back to her chair near the table.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PEEP-HOLE IN THE FLOOR.

It was seven o'clock when Old Owlet as Cyrus Delafield with a good-sized grip arrived at the residence of Mrs. Larrigan, housekeeper, intending to take formal possession of the room.

He thought best to go to the lady's door first and let her know that he had arrived on the premises, and he found her all smiles as she assured him that the room had been put in apple-pie order and she was sure he would like the new quarters.

Orson Owlet made himself at home at once by placing his grip in the wardrobe after taking out a few necessary articles of usefulness. Mrs. Larrigan remained long enough to note that he was an old roomer when she bade him good-night and withdrew.

If the good lady had not been a widow living alone, she might have told her husband that the new roomer was a confirmed bachelor, as she had seen them before; as it was, she had to keep the secret all to herself which, being loquacious, she very much regretted.

In a little while odors of tobacco came into the hall from over the transom of Delafield's room, as if the new tenant was celebrating the event by a good smoke, and this again confirmed Mrs. Larrigan's observations that he was both a bachelor and a nice gentleman.

The housekeeper sniffed the smoke and after awhile rapped lightly at the detective's door.

It was opened at once and she said, begging Old Owlet's pardon, that he would not be treated to the concert that night.

"The concert, did you say, madame?"

"Yes, the flute, you know. I mentioned the fact that the roomer under you was an Englishman who sometimes played."

"So you did. I was hoping that perhaps I might hear him to-night. I shall be disappointed I am sure."

"He dropped in a moment ago to say that he was going out of town—he goes quite often—and that I needn't look after the room till he returns. I dust it you know."

Owlet repeated that he was sorry the concert was not to materialize, but hoped to be treated to it before long, whereupon Mrs. Larrigan went back.

The house grew silent at last, even the housekeeper seemed to have retired.

The nearest clock had just struck eleven when the door of Old Owlet's room opened.

There crept forth the man of secrets and trails and moved toward Costerman's chamber. He went down-stairs without noise and at the foot of the flight stopped and listened.

Not a sound reached his ears save those that came in from the street, and after awhile he crept toward the door, where he stopped again.

The shadower must have suspected the man who roomed there as Costerman for in a short time he stood in the chamber with the door shut softly but surely behind him.

He saw that the blinds were open a little and that a streak of light came in from the street; he noticed that the furniture was disposed pretty much as it was in his own room, only two chairs instead of one were drawn up to the table that stood in the middle of the apartment, showing that Costerman at times had a visitor.

The detective took in everything and advanced toward the table, which was a very common affair, with an oil-cloth and two drawers.

Not an article of wearing apparel greeted his roving eye and the excursion he made to the wardrobe did not reward him very much.

Costerman was not a man with many changes of garments, for but parts of two suits hung in the wardrobe, and into the

several pockets of these the long fingers of Old Owlet searched.

He found in one of the drawers a flute of such peculiar workmanship that he carried it to the light and examined it closely.

It was a black flute, well polished and worn, and tipped in several places with silver, showing that it had been at one time an expensive instrument.

This was the instrument to which Mrs. Larrigan had referred, and for a second the leathery face of the veteran detective showed a smile as he turned the flute over and over in his hands.

"I shall have to drop in and hear my neighbor," thought Owlet, replacing the flute. "He has a treasure in this flute and, according to Mrs. Larrigan he knows how to coax music from it."

Nothing in the little room escaped the detective's eye. He went over it with the skill of the true ferret, handling many things with care and replacing them with the same pains. He picked up nothing without first noting how it was lying, and when he had put it down not a single particle of dust had been disturbed, thanks to his keen eye and long silken fingers.

He returned to his own chamber at last. If he had made any discoveries he did not show it by his face; he simply quitted the room with the same caution by which he had invaded it, went up-stairs to his own apartments and seemingly went to bed.

He wondered if it was Costerman's custom to send word to Mrs. Larrigan that he had been called out of town. This time, however, he had come in person to say that he would not be visible in the house for several days; but according to the housekeeper he had gone away without looking into his room.

It was long after midnight when Old Owlet turned toward the door and listened.

Some one was in the room below. There was no mistaking this, for he heard some one moving about and a chair was set down apparently in the middle of the room.

Pushing his own seat back, Old Owlet got down upon all-fours and turned back the carpet.

A light had been struck in the lower room and a man occupied a chair at the table.

Being almost directly above him, Owlet could not get a very good view of his face, but he saw that a dark mustache covered the upper lip and that the hands that rested on the oil-cloth were white and soft as if they seldom felt the sun.

The man was quite alone.

One thing Owlet knew very well. This was not the man he had tracked from Mulberry street; this was not the fellow whom he had seen enter and emerge from the house. He might be Costerman, but if so, he did not tally with Mrs. Larrigan's description of the Englishman.

The detective at the peep-hole in the floor watched the man who took writing materials from the drawer and applied himself to the writing of a letter. With a glass Owlet might have followed the pen across the paper, making out the words as they fell in black from the nib; but he had not provided himself with one, therefore he could only watch and wait.

"Jack has a nice place here—a quiet little nest," suddenly said the man, as he settled back in the chair with the finished letter before him. "I wouldn't want a nicer place, and here he can play the game out in a royal manner. By Jove! I've got a notion to turn in here, only I don't just know the rules of the house, and the landlady might see me."

"This looks inviting," he stood at the bed now and his hands rested on the coverlet. "It's as good as I've got and the Captain himself can't have it better. But we'll have it just as good by and by, and Jack will have it better than this. I wonder if the landlady is suspicious. Jack says not. I guess he keeps her charmed with the flute, ha, ha. He would make a fine Orpheus and just now we're after the Golden Fleece and it may take some music to charm the dragons that guard it."

He walked back and folded the letter which he had left on the table.

"I wonder what Popsy thinks of me by this time?" he suddenly went on with another of his laughs. "Guess he thought he

was bargaining with Satan or one of his imps, the old rascal! But he said nothing, no, of course not. It was a cool game and I had to let the old chap know that I knew him. I've got a notion to go back and get another paper. May want to use it some day. The other worked well and we've got the ferrets completely fooled. Popsy of Seville, you daren't say a word, for we know, and I can play a hand deadly and desperate at a moment's warning."

He hid the letter in his bosom and dropped into the chair again.

"The house is dreadfully quiet. Wonder if it is so all the time. I might get a place here myself. I would then be near Jack, but Jack might object. Who is he now? Oh, yes, Costerman, the Londoner, doing New York on the quiet in the interest of a newspaper. What role can't Jack play I would like to know! Cool and collected, ready for any emergency, he is the mainstay of the game, and without him we couldn't rake in a single pot. And the Captain and Carmel? What would they do without Jack? Boyd Coyningham, you would fail without him. And you, Carmel, you would have to give up your visions of riches if Jack should drop out of the drama."

He picked up his hat and lowered the light. Old Owlet saw that he was tall and well built, and that he had a great breadth of chest and keen roving black eyes, that he might be a very dangerous man.

"I got another look at the girl—the 'phone fairy," he laughed. "She was home and she saw me, but what of that? She's liable to see more of me. No wonder the boy fell into the snare of beauty. She's worth quarreling about. I would have a word about her myself even with the governor."

He opened the door and leaned out into the hall, then, evidently seeing that the coast was clear, he extinguished the light and vanished.

Old Owlet immediately rose and sprang to his own door which he opened noiselessly and listened. He heard the man on the next landing, and sidling along the wall, he caught a moment's glimpse of him between the last steps and the street.

Orson Owlet slipped down after the man. He caught sight of him some distance from the house and followed at once. He became his shadow among shadows, and after following him up one street and down another, saw him at last enter a house by means of a latch-key with the air of a lodger.

The old ferret turned back.

Once more he re-entered Mrs. Larrigan's establishment and, after another cigar, went to bed.

"So that man called on Popsy Vane, did he?" he thought. "Called on the old fox and played a hand which must remain a secret unless I can get hold of it. We'll see," and with this Orson Owlet fell asleep.

He was awakened the next morning by strains of music that seemed to come up from below.

"When did he come in?" he exclaimed, leaning over the edge of the bed as he listened. "When did my flutist drop back?"

The music went on with Owlet an attentive listener, and as the morning light grew stronger, he dropped out of bed and down upon the floor.

He saw a man sitting bold upright in bed playing the flute, and an expression of surprise fell from his lips as he got a good look at him.

He might be Costerman, the Briton; but he had seen that face before.

On the stand at the side of the bed lay a pair of side-whiskers and near by a hat which was also familiar to him.

"I'll confirm what I more than half believe," said he, "or go without my breakfast. The face! I saw it once under circumstances I shall never forget. There are the same eyes and the singular puckering of the lips when they go to play. The other one was a flutist, and I once heard him among the prisoners of Dartmoor; and he wasn't an Englishman either."

Owlet watched and listened till the man grew tired of his own music, when he threw the instrument upon the foot of the bed and put on the side-whiskers which at once completely altered his appearance.

"First the little book and the photograph," said Owlet. "Then Old Popsy in his den."

The detective slipped from the room fully dressed and returned to his old quarters. He opened the secret treasure-house in the wall and fished from its depths a little memorandum-book and a folding photograph album.

He opened the latter at a certain picture which he studied a moment, then turned to the book, which he examined till his finger stopped at the following:

"P. S.
26,999.
6."

Orson Owlet said nothing, but his eyes fairly shone.

CHAPTER VIII.

FERRET AND CHARLATAN.

BACK to the photograph wandered the eye of the veteran Vidocq.

Orson Owlet, alone in his little den, seemed to take great delight in studying the rather handsome face before him. It was the face of a man about thirty, with sharp features and clear eyes which, from the color of the hair in the picture, must have been dark and piercing.

It was an ordinary photograph showing wear, as if it had been handled a good many times by some one studying the face as Old Owlet was doing.

He gave no clue to the identity of that face, but it was evident that the detective connected the figures in the memorandum with the picture.

At last he laid the photograph inside the little book at the leaf which bore the figures and replaced all in the wall cupboard.

Perhaps the look had given him renewed hope, for he lit a cigar, and with his feet resting on the edge of the table, he blew smoke rings ceilingward as he seemed to fall into deep reflection—one of his favorite moods.

"Now for Popsy Vane," cried he, lowering his feet and casting the very small remnant of the cigar into the spittoon. "I haven't seen the old fellow in months and he may not care to see me now, but I can't help that."

He found the old astrologer at home as, indeed, he seldom left the place where he lived, and when Owlet opened the door and paused for a moment there Old Popsy leaned across his table.

Their eyes met and the hands of Popsy Vane came up and were crossed on the table-cloth.

"I thought you would drop in some time," he said with a ghastly smile that vanished almost as soon as it appeared. "Indeed, I've been waiting for you, Orson."

"You've been waiting for me, eh?" answered Owlet, crossing the room and taking one of the skeleton hands that was lifted for the greeting. "Well, all you had to do was to send for me. You know where I am, Popsy."

"Of course, but, you see, I knew you would come."

Owlet sat down with the table between them and for a moment they looked at one another in a strange, half challenging way.

"So you let a man beat you?" said the detective. "You let him play his hand and rake in the stakes?"

Popsy Vane seemed to fall back. He appeared to recoil as his face changed color slightly and he shook before Old Owlet's eyes.

"Do you know that? But pshaw! you know everything. I let him beat me, but by Jove! I don't believe he was human, Orson."

"You don't carry your trade that far, eh, Popsy? You don't believe that you have been euchered by Satan or one of his agents."

"I—I don't know what to think. But where did you hear of it? Have you seen him?"

Owlet smiled and nodded.

"Where is he, and what did he do with it?"

"He says it worked like a charm. He is a good-looking dog, Popsy."

"As handsome as Adonis! The moment he came in and looked at me I knew that I was dealing with a cool head."

"But you didn't go down without a struggle?"

"No," Popsy brightened up. "But I

couldn't help it. You don't know how that man played his hand, and I—I can't tell you. You must excuse me, Orson."

Old Owlet let the face before him escape his gaze for a second, but he had no idea of giving up the struggle then and there. He had not come to Popsy Vane's den to be baffled in that manner.

"The world don't know it all," he remarked, seeming to look away from Old Popsy, but in reality looking at him. "That is, Popsy, it doesn't know all about you."

"I hope not, Orson."

"You have kept one or two chapters hidden. There is the trial—the one in Seville, you know—"

"To perdition with that memory!"

"Yes, yes—I have heard you say that before now. It was a narrow escape. It was not proven, Popsy, and you got off remarkably well."

There was no reply.

"You and I are the only persons in New York who know about that episode."

"I wish we were, but that man—if man he was—knows as well."

"Ah, was that the card he played? Did he hold that club over your head, Popsy?"

The old astrologer's chin fell upon his breast and a groan escaped him.

"See here, Popsy; did you let him have one of your infernal philters?"

"I had to."

"You were frightened into it, were you?"

"The old trial, Orson—the chapter from my life across the ocean. He knows all about it."

The confession, wrung from Popsy Vane's heart, made Owlet pity the old man.

"Did you know the man, Popsy?" he inquired.

"I did not."

"But he knew you?"

"Of course. He knew all about me. I dared not deny that I had the stuff in the house."

"I warned you months ago that it would some day get you into trouble. New York is not the Old World. This is not the age of the Borgias, Popsy."

"I know, but I never intended to let one package get beyond my clutches. I thought that some day, if misfortunes overtook me, the philter would come handy."

"You intended to play coward, then? You thought of shuffling off this mortal coil with one of your infamous philters, the very possession of which lays you amenable to American law."

"What a fool I was to let him have it!"

"You have plenty of money. You have made it hand over fist from your dupes, most of whom can pay liberally for the horoscopes they get. This man paid you, did he?"

"He paid me," and Popsy Vane's face seemed to become seared as if by a red-hot iron. "What do you think he paid me in, Orson?"

"In your own coin, no doubt."

The old man unlocked a drawer underneath the table and drew out the broken bracelet and threw it down before the detective.

"That's the 'cash' I got for the philter! You know whose it was, Orson?"

"It belonged to her," said the ferret, picking up the links and eying them for a minute.

"It was hers, and he paid for the philter in that terrible coin. It took my breath, Orson. I fell like one dead from my chair when the door had closed upon him."

"I don't doubt it."

"But what has happened? Who took the philter?"

"Perhaps no one."

"Ah, that is relief," and Popsy Vane smiled once more. "I have been in the agonies of death almost ever since he went off with the thing in his possession."

"He may come back for another."

Popsy laughed.

"This time I will circumvent him. All the threats in this world, and a thousand bracelets like the piece before you, Orson, cannot force another one from me. I am philterless."

"What have you done with them?"

The skeleton hand pointed toward the grate,

"You burnt them—all, Popsy?"

"Every one!"

"Not one reserved for yourself?"

"As I live, not one. Let him come. I am safe now!"

"But look here, I want to know. The accursed thing leaves behind a sign, doesn't it?"

"Did I ever tell you that it does?"

"Long ago you told me so."

"It leaves behind a sign, but the shrewdest toxicologists in the world would not detect it."

"I believe you said so the night you told me about your philter."

"It has baffled the best of them in the Old World. It has been the deadly agent of the secret slayer in ducal times and it came down to me—but let that be the one secret I shall keep even from you, Owlet."

"Keep it, Popsy," replied Owlet. "That is one thing which you need not share with me. Now, the sign of the philter's work."

"First the outside," and Popsy Vane left his chair and opened the door leading into the hall.

He poked his head out and looked up and down the corridor. No one was in sight. Shutting the door, he turned the key and came back to his visitor. Instead of sitting down, he rested his hands on the table and leaned toward Orson Owlet.

The old man's thin lips almost touched the detective's ear.

He whispered there for the space of half a minute. Owlet neither looked up or to one side; his gaze seemed to be riveted upon the window opposite.

"There, you know what I have never told a living soul," said Popsy, falling back. "I would not keep it from you, Orson; I dare not, to tell the truth. Why should I lie to—to you, old man?"

"Exactly," smiled the detective. "The sign will be looked after. You say that it can be seen even six months after death?"

"Only by those who know where to look for it," breathed Popsy Vane.

"Thanks, old man. You need not fear; the secret is safe with me."

"But who has taken the philter, or, in other words, what did the handsome fiend do with it?"

"Time shall answer that."

"And get me into the toils anew?" cried the affrighted man, drawing back. "After all, Orson, you are going to tighten the noose under my chin."

"Not so bad as that, Popsy. I will not forget the sign."

"Who was the victim, Orson?"

"The presence of the sign will establish that."

"Keep it back, then. Don't tell me any more. Did the fiend do it? Did he go straight to his victim with the potion? You must reach him, Orson. No one ever escapes you. I know that. They all fall into your drag-net. If I was in your road and the clues pointed to me you would run me down."

"I would, Popsy. You know that."

Owlet rose and touched Popsy's hand.

"Send me word if he comes again," said he.

The old astrologer smiled diabolically as he answered:

"I will—if I don't kill the wretch!"

Old Owlet laughed as he looked at Popsy and, smiling still, he went away.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BLACK-HANDLED DAGGER.

WITH her father laid away in the family vault, Mora Esty went back to the house on the Avenue and gave way to her great grief.

She was a firm believer in her brother's innocence, and could not think who could have taken her father's life. True the millionaire kept his secrets from his children, and while Mora had been very close to him, he had never taken her very far into his confidence.

To think that he had been deliberately murdered was a shock to her which, but for her determination to bear up under the calamity and live to see the guilty punished, would have driven her to her room and perhaps to the grave.

Harold had been permitted to attend the

funeral, and he and Mora rode back to the city with their hands clasped in their grief, but talking little.

Mora Esty looked at her brother and took compassion on his grief, but had not the heart to bring up the subject nearest her heart at that time—his arrest and imprisonment.

"One moment—one word with him," cried the girl as she was about to alight in front of the desolate home, for Harold was to be driven back to his cell.

Harold said nothing, but took Mora's hand. The millionaire's daughter leaned toward him and her lips almost touched his ear.

"All will be well, Harold," said she. "I don't believe this terrible charge. I will see that the guilty is punished and that the clouds pass away."

He looked at her, his eyes filled with gratitude, and pressed her hand.

"Where is she—where is Hetty?" asked Mora.

Harold started. It was the first time his sister had ever spoken Hetty's name in his presence.

The accused man gave her the girl's address and then said:

"You will not hate Hetty, Mora?"

"No. I will see her, though. I may need her in my quest. Good-by, Harold."

Thus they parted, and as Mora mounted the steps the cab turned and Harold was whisked away.

Mora was met in the hall by the maid who came forward with a troubled face and said softly:

"I may have done wrong, Miss Mora, but he insisted. He is in yonder," and she pointed toward the parlor on the right.

Mora Esty went to the door and opened it softly. The room had been darkened, but she caught sight of a form on the sofa and in another moment she stood face to face with a stranger.

The man rose when she entered and Mora stopped suddenly and looked into his smooth face, so dark and, to her, strangely suspicious.

"I have been waiting. I did not think it best to go away," said he. "If your maid violated orders let me be blamed for it, but I thought best to wait for you."

"I do not know you, and—"

"Then Harold, your brother did not mention to you that he had seen me?"

"He did not."

"You may call me Orson Owlet," was the reply. "I recall, putting this and that together, that your brother must have been arrested on his return home from seeing me."

"It may be so."

Old Owlet stood looking down at Mora in the semi-darkened room; but he could see the lines of set resolution which had already formed at her mouth and they seemed to tell him that she was a woman whom he could trust in every way.

"I am what some term a man-hunter."

"Another?" cried the young girl with a start. "We have seen so much of such people since the terrible crime that—"

"That you have grown tired of them and their ways," smilingly interrupted the detective. "I do not doubt it, miss; but I am still another, and I am here to bother you, but, I trust, in the interest of eternal justice."

Mora may have noticed the slight emphasis which the detective put upon the last four words, but she waited for Old Owlet to proceed.

"Would you let me go over the ground?—that is, can I see the room, in fact, all the rooms on the fatal floor?"

"You shall see everything," was the reply. "Since you tell me that Harold was to see you—no doubt to enlist you in this very hunt—everything in this house is at your disposal."

The detective simply bowed and Mora led him from the room.

They went direct to the second floor and the young girl with a sigh conducted him to her father's bed-chamber.

She opened the door and looked up into Orson Owlet's face.

"I trust you have not come too late to find a clue. As I said, there have been more than one officer here and all have gone over the house time and again."

"In which room was the dagger found?"

"Ah, that fatal discovery! I cannot believe that Harold ever owned such a thing, but he refuses to explain. That is against him, don't you think?"

"It certainly prejudices the case against him," answered Owlet. "It was not found in this room?"

"No, in his own. It is off yonder—the first door to the right. The key is in the door now, for Norma has been dusting the furniture. She could not give up that duty despite the fear that he may need it no more."

After a few more words Old Owlet found himself alone on that floor, Mora having gone to her own room.

He shut the door of Payson Esty's room softly behind him. The curtains had been drawn and but little light came in at the windows. He changed all this by parting the curtains and flooding the fatal chamber with the garish light that shone in the streets.

It was his first visit to the scene of the mysterious crime. He had been preceded by the best of ferrets, and Jack Noddles, the man who had effected Harold's arrest, had gone over the premises with his keen scent.

Orson Owlet examined the room very closely. He knew that he was a late hound on the trail; he was aware that he was in the game at the eleventh hour; but this fact did not deter him. Nothing ever deterred this prince of human sleuths.

From the scene of the murder he advanced to Harold's room. There was one other chamber between them, and a peep into this showed him that the dead millionaire might have used it at times for a study room, for some books and numberless papers lay on a table which had not been dusted for days.

Harold's room was light and airy. It had a high ceiling and was cheerful and filled with bric-a-brac such as a young man with good taste and plenty of money would naturally accumulate.

Norma had dusted the room that very day, for not a particle of dust was to be seen.

Owlet had not come to the mansion in total ignorance of what had followed Harold Esty's arrest. He knew all that had passed at the station-house; he knew what Jack Noddles had said and done; he could go straight to the drawer in which the dagger had been found, and knew the spot where Jack said he had found it.

But Old Owlet did not go at once to the bureau. He made his way across the room and stopped at a mantel which was well covered with articles of bric-a-brac.

Most of these were odd things, some of which came from curio shops and were of foreign manufacture, such as pipes, knives and ink-stands.

They were not arranged with any regard for order, but were strewn promiscuously along the marble-top of the mantel as Harold had left them.

"Norma moves some of these things when she comes in," thought Owlet. "She dusts along the mantel without any respect for Harold's arrangement. I wonder where Norma is."

He was answered so suddenly that he could hardly repress a smile, for at that very moment the door opened and he stood face to face with Norma herself.

The maid drew back with a start and almost dropped the knob.

"I beg your pardon. I heard some one in here and thought it might be Miss Mora," stammered Norma as she flushed and drew back, but the hand of Owlet stopped her.

"One moment, if you please," he said. "Of course you are Miss Norma, the maid?"

"If you please. I have been Miss Norma's maid, for three years."

"And you like her?"

"Pray, why shouldn't I?" exclaimed the girl, who was a tall, handsome creature with deep brown eyes that were soft and expressive.

"You dust this room, don't you?"

"Once a day."

"You dust the mantel, too?"

Norma seemed to think that this was a singular question.

"Do you move these things?" and Owlet's hand designated the various things on the marble.

"I cannot help doing that, you must know. Some of them get in the way of the brush and they get moved. I did not know that I was not to dust the mantel, sir."

"True you had no orders to abstain. Now tell me, Norma, did you dust the morning after the murder?"

"I—I think I did. I am not quite sure I did, sir."

"You dusted so often that you must have become familiar with the objects on the mantel."

"I don't know about that. I can't say that I ever took much notice of them."

"On what part of the mantel did the dagger lay?"

"The black handled one?"

Owlet nodded.

The maid went toward the mantel, but stopped suddenly as if she had blundered.

"Of course you mean the one which they found in the drawer?" she said, looking at Old Owlet. "That is the one I used to see lying among the others."

"When did you miss it, Norma?"

"The morning after," answered the girl.

"It was not on the mantel when you dusted that morning?"

"I did not see it there."

"But the day before?"

Norma's gaze seemed to wander to the door.

"Don't do that!" she cried. "Don't mix me up in anything that may go against him. You are the first of all of them who has asked me such questions. I cannot—I will not say anything that may be used against Mora's brother, Harold."

For a moment Orson Owlet seemed to relent, then it looked as if he had carried his point, for he glanced toward the mantel and Norma took occasion to slide toward the door.

She was there when she looked back and saw the figure of the detective near the mantel and his thin hand had just lifted a curious looking dagger from the collection.

The next instant Norma had darted forward.

"That is the one I mean," she cried. "See, it has a black handle. I must have overlooked it. That is the black dagger I referred to."

Old Owlet turned upon the girl, but said nothing, and she, with a half-suppressed cry, recoiled again.

"Refresh your memory," said Orson.

"Go back a little and recall what you have just said about missing the black one which Detective Noddles found in yon drawer."

Norma was speechless.

"I was wrong. I did not know that one was there. I am willing to swear that that is the only black dagger I ever saw on the mantel."

"Black, did you say? Look at it now with the light on the hilt. It is gray."

The dagger hilt turned toward her he was looking at the girl and she clasped her hands as she exclaimed:

"Merciful heavens, what have I said? But don't use it against him. Let me keep the secret for his sake. The really black-handled dagger I saw there the day before the murder; but it was not there the day after. It was found in his drawer, blood-stained. And he quarreled with his father that awful night—quarreled again about that girl!"

CHAPTER X.

SUDDEN FLIGHT.

WHATEVER Orson Owlet drew from his interview with Norma the maid he kept well to himself. The contradictory statements made by the girl might have furnished the old detective with a clue to be followed up as the trail grew in interest, but Norma was let go without apparent notice taken of her words, and in a short time the ferret went down to where Mora awaited him.

Esty's daughter watched him enter the room with eyes that were filled with anxiety. She waited for him to speak and after awhile the detective said:

"I find things about as they were left by your brother, I suppose."

"Harold always kept his room in good order and was careful as to neatness. Norma, as I have told you, has dusted the furniture for years, and while she may have displaced a few trinkets, such as those on the mantel, she has not seriously interfered with Harold's arrangement of things in his room."

"Norma is industrious and careful, is she not?"

"I have always found her so. We think we secured a good bargain in the girl."

"Did she live in the city when you engaged her?"

"She did. Father found her out and seeing in her, as he thought, just the maid I would like, engaged her without consulting me."

"She seems to have been attached to your brother Harold."

Mora smiled a little.

"Norma was always ready to serve him. We have had her with us nearly three years and not a disagreement have we had in all that time. You can trust Norma in every way, and if she knows anything about this terrible crime which has darkened this house she will not hesitate to reveal the secret."

"She was with you that night?"

"She was out visiting a friend until eleven. We give Norma all the pleasure she wants for she has deserved it and that night she was out, as I have said."

"Was any part of the house open when she came in?"

"She found it locked as usual, but she used her latch-key and entering, went straight to bed."

"I thought," observed Old Owlet, slightly lowering his voice, "that Harold made his discovery shortly after ten."

"He did according to his time and ours. But that night Norma had borrowed her friend's watch and it was fast, which made it nearly eleven when she came in. She could not have been in bed fifteen minutes when Harold sounded the dreadful alarm."

"I believe you stated at the inquest that your father had no enemies to your knowledge, Miss Mora."

"If he had one he kept from me the fact of that foe's existence; but a cruel, murderous enemy he must have had."

"It would seem so," remarked Owlet. "Was your father ever out of the city much?"

"Very little. I recall but one trip out within three years and that was last summer when he went South and remained two weeks."

"What was the nature of that trip?"

"It was a business trip. He had purchased at a venture some North Carolina mica land and went thither to inspect his investment. He came back somewhat elated over it, but I believe he afterward sold it at a sacrifice."

"That was his last trip?"

"Yes, the last one."

"He had retired from the field of speculation also, I believe?"

"Entirely so. He offered his experience to Harold, but, my brother not being of a speculative turn of mind, did not care to go into Wall street, which refusal rather pleased father than otherwise. He told Harold that we had enough of this world's goods and that it was not necessary to risk one's money down there."

"Now, Miss Mora, I am going to ask a question which you may not care to answer," said the detective, leaning forward in his chair as he fixed his dark but now not piercing eyes upon the fair girl seated before him.

"You can proceed, sir. I am here to give you all the information I can. Such I believe to be my duty."

"Have you ever had an offer of marriage?"

It was a query that brought a smile to Mora Esty's lips, and it lingered there a full second while she looked at the old ferret.

"Of course I do not know what bearing my answer will have upon this matter?" said she, "but you shall be answered truthfully. I had an offer of marriage in the winter. But I did not think much of it—so little, indeed, that I dismissed it in a moment."

"Young ladies, as a rule, seldom treat such important things so lightly."

"I know, but this one came from a man

with whom I had no previous acquaintance—a man who until the night the offer was made I had never seen before—that I dismissed it as a foolish incident due perhaps to a stranger's impudence."

"Who was the man?"

"I never thought enough of the incident to inquire. It happened at a german, the last one I have attended. It was a rather promiscuous affair, though the people seemed all right, and I went home in the family carriage, scarcely thinking of the offer."

"And you have not seen the man since?"

"But once, I believe, or, at least, I thought I did, and strange to say it was early in the evening of the fatal day."

"The day of the crime?"

"The fatal 25th," answered Mora. "I had gone into the Park for a little air, and all at once I found myself face to face with that same man."

"Was there any recognition?"

"He smiled and raised his hat, that was all."

"No attempt to speak to you?"

"None at all."

"Were you alone in the Park?—that is, was Norma with you?"

"Norma had already gone to make the call I have referred to, and no one saw the stranger but myself."

"What was this man like?"

"He was tall and straight, and I should judge a man of forty-two or forty-five. He wore a full beard, short and quite black; his eyes were soft and rather fascinating, if I may so speak, and his clothes were gray and new. I noticed all these things half unconsciously, never expecting to refer to them again, much less dreaming that I was soon to stand over my father's corpse. He passed from my sight, the strange one did, and I saw no more of him."

"But the name he gave when he made the sudden offer of marriage?" queried the detective.

Mora Esty thought a moment.

"He gave me a card at the time and I believe I can find it. Would you like to have it?"

"If you please."

The millionaire's daughter left the room and was absent some five minutes.

"I found it after a long hunt, or at least what there is left of it. I remember tearing it on my way home that night, and I can find but one piece, the smallest one."

She handed the detective a torn card which was taken and carried to the light.

"It was a common card, but it had been torn across the name and all that Old Owlet saw was the fragment name:

"—RSET."

"Was the name Somerset?" he asked, looking up.

"Really, I don't remember, but the fragment in your hand would indicate that it was."

"True. The offer of marriage seemed to you to be an impulse?"

"It impressed me that way," smiled the girl. "Of course coming as it did during an interval between dances and from a stranger, it would not be likely to receive much consideration. The romance of it even passed out of my mind and I did not think of it the day after."

"Which caused you not to inquire after the man through the lady who gave the german?"

"I never asked her. In fact, she left the city the day after the event."

Old Owlet seemed a little disappointed over this last reply, but he put the torn card in his pocket and soon after arose to depart.

Mora followed him to the door.

"You will do all you can for my brother, won't you?" she anxiously inquired.

"All I can, miss."

"What do you think? It cannot be that you deem him guilty of this crime? No, that is out of the question, I care not what the English detective found in his room. Harold quarreled with his father over a young girl with whom he has fallen in love, but they never came to such terrible work as was done in this house the night of the twenty-fifth. That quarrel was satisfactorily patched up between them and Harold was in good spirits over the matter."

"There was but one quarrel, Mora?"

The girl started slightly.

"Norma says there were two," she admitted as her face grew pale. "Norma says there was another the night of the crime. I did not hear it, and Harold—I have no chance to ask him, poor boy."

Old Owlet left the millionaire's child on the steps of the Avenue mansion and went away.

Instead of going back to his den near Broadway he turned up in Mrs. Larrigan's house as Cyrus Delafield, the roomer.

He went direct to his apartment to be met by the landlady in the hall near the door.

"Well, we have lost our flute-player," were the words with which she greeted Owlet.

"Lost him and just when I was hoping to be regaled with some dulcet strains. Lost him so soon, Mrs. Larrigan? It cannot be."

"He has moved out to be gone for good this time, I regret to say. He called awhile ago and informed me that the room was at my disposal. If you care to get down on the lower floor I can let you have his room, as I believe you said when you came that a lower apartment would have suited you best."

"While I am sorry that you have lost a good-paying roomer, I will take his room."

"I thought you would and I shall be delighted to let you in at once."

The change was made in a short time, and Owlet, seated in Costerman's room, looked at the walls with a quizzical expression.

Perhaps he wondered what had occasioned the flute-player's sudden flight. He recalled his last view of him seated in bed playing the flute with the false whiskers on the little stand alongside the couch, and how he had hastened home and consulted a memorandum and a photograph, as if he connected both with Mrs. Larrigan's roomer.

Truth is that Old Owlet believed that Jack Noddles, the detective, and Costerman were one and the same person—that the so-called English ferret had more than one name, and that he was playing a double role for a purpose.

But already the bird had flown. Had he suspected anything? Had he discovered the identity of the man overhead—the keen-scented trailer who had watched him through a peep-hole in the floor; or had he remained his allotted time at Mrs. Larrigan's and was ready to go away?

Old Owlet searched the room which had been vacated by Costerman or Jack Noddles.

Nothing escaped him this time and he was not so careful as he had been on his former visit.

But the London detective had carried off everything belonging to him, and first of all the wonderful flute had been taken; the wardrobe had been stripped, and all that Owlet found was a torn envelope lying on the floor addressed to Burton Costerman.

He was turning to the table with the envelope in his hand when the door opened.

The handsome man with the black mustache stood on the threshold, but seeing Owlet he drew back with a half-muttered apology.

"Mr. Costerman has given up the room and another gentleman occupies it," said the shrill voice of Mrs. Larrigan from the hall; and the next moment the door was shut and with the closing vanished the face of the unknown Adonis.

Old Owlet smiled to himself over this little incident.

CHAPTER XI.

THREE BIRDS OF A FEATHER.

THERE was one thing of which the Detective of Gotham was quite certain and this was that Costerman, the flute-player, was nobody other than Jack Noddles, the so-called London Detective.

This was the man who had secured the arrest of Harold Esty for the murder of his father, and it was Jack's hand that had found the dagger in the bureau and which had fastened around the young man a chain of circumstances which threatened to send him to the noose.

The reader will remember that Owlet when he consulted his little memorandum in the

seclusion of his den came across and stopped at the following enigmatical entry:

"P. S.
26,999.
6."

This might apply to the London Detective, or it might mean something quite different, but used in connection with the photograph examined at the same time, it was quite likely to refer to the flute-player of Mrs. Larrigan's establishment.

The letters and figures that constituted this queer entry had been written with a pencil, but were still quite distinct. They had been in Owlet's possession some years and had crossed the ocean with him.

The detective had not always confined his chases to America; he had tracked men throughout Europe, and in the capacity of tracker he had visited some of the celebrated prisons of the continent.

Dartmoor Prison had a system of distinguishing its inmates which was told by the entry in the memorandum. The "P. S." meant "penal servitude," the figures were the number of the convict, while the 6, standing by itself indicated the length of time for which the convict in question, No. 26,999, had been sentenced—six years.

It was not Old Owlet's intention to lose sight of Jack Noddles in this summary manner. When he had once scented a quarry there was no quitting the trail, no matter what occurred, until he stood at the end of it.

Noddles, as Costerman, had vanished like a sunbeam. The very suddenness of his departure suggested suspicion, for Mrs. Larrigan informed Owlet that he had paid a month's rent in advance and she expected him to keep the room indefinitely.

Then there was the handsome man who had called too late to find Jack in—the same fellow whom Old Owlet had watched from the peep-hole, and whom he had heard talk aloud and to himself about getting the best of Popsy Vane by securing one of his celebrated but very dangerous philters.

The London Detective was associated in Owlet's mind with the memorandum and the photograph which happened to be a prison one. It had been taken at Dartmoor during No. 26,999's confinement there, and had fallen into the old ferret's hands in a manner not necessary to mention here.

If Jack had scented the game—if he suspected Old Owlet—he would play a sly hand, and would not hesitate to become the most dangerous enemy a ferret ever had; but did he really suspect?

He had secured much notoriety by the arrest of Harold Esty about whom the coils had been startlingly wound, for it was admitted that with what the Englishman had discovered there was little hope for the young man.

Costerman had probably vanished and Jack would now take his place in the drama. Old Owlet believed this.

Still keeping his rooms at Mrs. Larrigan's as Cyrus Delafield, he began his hunt for the missing clue.

The man who had called on Jack to find the detective occupying his room went off with a startled face.

"Gone, eh, and without letting me know anything about the flight!" he growled when he found himself on the street. "He let me poke my nose into another's room and whoever that man was, he got a good look at me. It was a mean trick on Jack's part and I shall tell him as much when I find him."

He seemed to know where to look for Noddles, did this man whom Popsy Vane had called an Adonis, for half an hour later he opened a certain door and came suddenly upon the London Detective stretched at full length on a sofa in a well-furnished room.

"So you've sloped from the little nest and without so much as giving me a hint of your going?" said the good-looker as he shut the door and came forward. "Do you know you nearly got me into trouble?"

"How?" asked Jack, taking the cigar from between his lips and looking half amazed at the speaker.

"Why, I ran into the man who now occupies the room you vacated. I opened the door thinking to find you there, and I stood face to face with him."

"The deuce you did!"

"That's just what happened and he gave me a look that seemed to pierce me through. Your landlady told me that you were gone and I sloped without a word of apology."

"What sort of looking man is he?" queried Jack.

"Did not look at him very sharp, but I saw a beard and a pair of dark eyes capable of doing some sharp work. He was taking his ease in your chair and looked like a monarch of all he surveyed. What made you pull out so unceremoniously?"

A smile for a moment overspread Jack Noddles's face, but all at once it grew serious. "I guess I know when I've occupied one nest long enough," he exclaimed. "I saw that the time had come to go back to my old plumage, and that's why I'm here."

"What has happened?"

"I didn't quite like the place."

"It was quiet."

"Yes."

"And the landlady didn't seem over inquisitive."

"I can't say that she did. But you see she took a new roomer while I was out."

"The one I saw, eh?"

"That man. He was just over me when I discovered that he had taken a room and then I made up my mind."

"You saw him, then?"

"I saw him," and there came to Jack Noddles's face a very singular expression. "Look here, Harvey; I know when to pull up stakes and when to quit a place where there is some danger."

"Who is that man?"

Jack took a cigar from the open box on the table and raised himself on the sofa.

"You don't know him?"

"Not in that beard at any rate."

"You remember the card Carmel received from Popsy Vane, the old charlatan?"

"Yes, I saw it."

"Then you know who the last roomer was."

The sport's face seemed to lose some of its ruddy color. He started visibly and then looked at Jack whose face at the moment was nearly hidden by tobacco smoke.

"You don't mean to say that he is Dunbar Vivier, or, in other words, Orson Owlet, the ferret?" he cried.

"Such is the true identity of that man, my dear Hawk. Carmel got something at Popsy's and I have confirmed the news."

"And Boyd? Does he know?"

"Of course. He would be the first to hear it."

"What does he say?"

Jack leaned toward the floor and drew an imaginary circle there with his right hand.

"Yes, if you are right," said Harvey Hawk. "If that man is really Orson Owlet the circle shall play its part."

"Look at things as they are," was the reply. "That man is as surely Dunbar Vivier, though known to New York as Orson Owlet as I am"—he lowered, his voice, "as I am 26,999."

"It's a bad outlook. I mean that we must go to work at once. Where is Carmel?"

"Up-stairs."

"Call her down."

Harvey Hawk went toward the door, but the London Detective called him back.

"Carmel is not very well this morning," said he. "Don't disturb her. She will be down in a few minutes. The Captain must be in, too, before long and then all four of us will have a confab."

Hawk came back to the chair and dropped into its softness with a look at Noddles.

"If this man should suspect you—if Orson Owlet has discovered that you are No. 26,999 and not Jack Noddles the Scotland Yarder—"

"I believe he knows that now."

"The deuce you do! It seems to me you are taking it very cool?"

"Why not?" smiled Jack, as he knocked the ashes from his cigar. "How else should the belief be taken? I should like to know."

"Of course nerve plays the game from now on."

"Nerve has played it up till now, and we must not lose our nerve for a single moment."

Just then footsteps were heard in the hall beyond the door and a rattle of garments

followed the opening of the portal. Carmel stood before the two men.

"So you are back?" she said, with a look at Hawk. "You might have called me."

"Jack said not, as you were indisposed."

The woman smiled, showing two rows of white teeth even and beautiful.

"She grows in beauty," thought Hawk, while he looked at Carmel. "But after all I can't say that she outshines the 'phone-fairy, though Carmel has more years with her and knows the world better."

Carmel came forward and took a seat as she turned again to Harvey.

"Jack has told you, has he?" she said.

"About his sudden flight and discovery?"

"Yes."

"He has run into a hornets' nest, seems to me, and we must do something to repair the break."

"It was no break," put in Noddles, with some resentment. "It was accursed fortune, that was all. How could I know that that keen man was to come into the house as Cyrus Delafield? If I had known that I might tell another story now. It was the unexpected that happened, and I must not be held responsible for it."

"Of course not," said Carmel, with a glance at Harvey Hawk. "No one accuses you of making a bad play. This man is liable to turn up any time and at any place. That is his business. You must look at once to the girl."

She addressed her last words to Hawk and that individual understood at once.

"She is going off to-morrow."

"To-morrow?" cried Carmel. "That may be too late. You don't know the wiles nor the power of this one ferret. You haven't seen him at work as Jack and I have. You must send her off to-night. Bring her here."

"Yes," said the London Detective, "bring her to this house to-night. She will come with you, Harvey?"

"If I say so."

"Then bring her hither before morning."

"It shall be done."

"After that the next play comes; then you can renew your suit, Harvey."

There was no reply.

"You understand the game thoroughly," continued Carmel, going over to Harvey Hawk and laying a hand upon his arm. "You must know that it lies in our hands now and that all we have to do to win the stakes is to play coolly and without any show of fear. Jack's keenness has armed us all. We know that our enemy is Dunbar Vivier, called Old Owlet, and this man with all his acumen is on the trail. But with Jack to play against him clues will be as scarce as snow in Egypt. When the time comes—and it will not be delayed very long—this ferret will feel a blow, not knowing who struck it nor from whence it came!"

The eyes of Carmel fairly flashed, and she went back to her chair and re-seated herself with the dignity of a queen.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MAID WHO VANISHED.

CARMEL was a character.

This beautiful and cool-headed creature who could utter the words she did had a figure which was sylph-like grace itself.

Whatever her past may have been, and it seemed to be known only by the men who were her companions, it had not spoiled her good looks nor diminished her courage.

Carmel was American, though some would have called her Spanish because of her sloe-black eyes.

Jack Noddles, though playing English detective, was American also, though he knew London like an open book and could affect the English style to perfection.

The only person in the room who gave evidence of having foreign blood in his veins was Harvey Hawk, yet he would have deceived the most knowing ethnologist.

Fate, perhaps fortune, had brought these people together, but there was another—Boyd Coyningham.

Jack called him "Captain Boyd" and it was noticed that he always spoke of him with deference, as if he was a superior person, while Carmel referred to him with more freedom of spirit.

It was the morning after the interview which concludes our last chapter when Old Owlet found on his return to his old quarters a letter which had come through the post.

The superscription was strange to him, but a glance at the signature told him that his correspondent was Mora Esty.

The body of the letter was brief, but a little startling.

It informed the ferret that Norma, the maid, had decamped—that she had run away, leaving behind her evidences of flight showing that she did not intend to return any more.

Mora had made the discovery the night before, and had posted the letter in the nearest letter-box to the address Old Owlet had given her.

"So the maid who knew where the black-handled dagger was kept has vanished?" said he to himself. "So Norma takes it into her head to disappear, and just when we may want her."

He did not bother himself about quitting the room. He read the letter carefully and then went to the Esty mansion.

Mora, anxious and a little excited, waited for him in the parlor.

"I am glad you have come," said the millionaire's daughter. "I have left the girl's room quite undisturbed. Not a thing has been moved, and the letter she left on the table is there yet."

"Oh, she left a letter, did she?"

"A note, in fact. But let us go up and see."

Mora led Old Owlet to the maid's room.

It was in confusion. Here and there were articles of female wear, and everywhere in the chamber were to be seen evidences of abrupt flight.

Owlet picked up the scribbled sheet which Mora had already found lying on the dresser and read it.

In it Norma begged her mistress's pardon for her hasty flight, and justified it by saying that she feared they might want to use her against Harold, and she really knew much crinating, which, if she were forced to tell it, would only darken the case against him.

"I do not believe she knows anything against him," said Mora, who did not speak till the detective looked up from the note. "She has invented that story. Norma has been tampered with. She has gone off for cause."

Old Owlet did not confirm the girl's words, though he looked at her and seemed to smile faintly.

"She has taken but a few things with her," continued Mora. "She has left some of her best garments, but she took along all her letters, and the little work-case I gave her last Christmas."

"When did you discover her flight?"

"At ten last night. She generally attends me at that hour, but I waited in my room for her, and, tired of waiting, went to see what detained her. Then I made the discovery that she had taken French leave, and the room was just as you see it now. While the flight must have been the result of a hasty decision, she went with some deliberation, as I can see by the things she selected. She went out through the rear entrance."

"What makes you believe this?"

"The rear door down stairs stood ajar, something unusual. I could have heard the front door if she had used it. She did not go that way."

"Do you think Norma was helped off?"

"I am almost sure she was in a certain sense. She had had advice."

"What proof have you of this?"

Mora seemed to reflect a moment, then she answered with some show of positiveness.

"I am almost prepared to say that she knew this man Noddles, the detective, before he presented himself at the house after the tragedy."

"Do you think so?"

"Norma came upon him suddenly while we were talking about the crime in the parlor, and I thought I detected a swift glance of recognition between the two."

"She went out often, did she?"

"We were not severe with Norma," said Mora. "She had all the freedom she asked for. One night three weeks ago she fell at the foot of the stairs and I helped her

to her room. She was slightly intoxicated."

"The girl was?"

"Yes, sir. It was our secret as I accepted her promise to do better and promised not to tell father."

"It was the last time for Norma, was it?"

"The last so far as I know."

"But she went out as often as before?"

"I saw no difference."

Orson Owlet again read Norma's letter through and folded it for his pocket.

"If Norma knows anything against Harold why should she run away with the secret? The other side would not suspect her guilty knowledge, and we would never call her forward with the statements."

"I have thought of that," replied Mora. "This girl is more than wayward. She is in the plot!"

It was not news to Owlet that Mora believed that her father had fallen victim to a gang of cold-blooded conspirators, but what was the *motif*?

Why had some one come to the millionaire's mansion at the dead of night and plunged a dagger into his neck, taking his life in cold blood?

"Have you examined the private papers belonging to your father since his death?" he asked Mora.

"I have gone through some of them, others I have not touched, as they are peculiarly sealed and seem too sacred for my curiosity."

"Are they in the safe in the room below?"

"No, in the hidden safe in the room where he died."

"The hidden safe, you say?"

"Yes."

Mora saw that the old ferret's look was one of interrogation and astonishment, and she at once led the way to the death chamber.

Orson Owlet looked around the room, but could see no signs of a safe.

"It is here and the secret is about the only real one father ever shared with me," remarked Mora, crossing the room and stopping at one of the walls.

She laid her hand on the wall and seemed to press it with some force at a certain spot.

A part of the wooden wall slid to one side and Owlet saw set in the wall the door of a small steel safe.

"Father had the safe put in here immediately after his return from North Carolina," she said as she looked up at the shadow. "I don't believe that Harold knew of its existence, for he was away from home at the time and, instead of placing the private papers found in the desk in the safe, he carried them for safety to his own room. The panel so deftly conceals the safe that father did not consider a combination lock necessary and therefore I can open it."

She did so and swung back the door.

The interior of the safe as revealed to Old Owlet was filled with papers, and Mora drew forth a package which was tied with a common cord.

"These I have looked at," she said.

"They consist of data concerning the mica mines and also the contract with his workmen and overseer. These—you see there is an inner packet—these are the accounts of the mines, not of much interest to you, perhaps. Here are the sealed packages," and she displayed another lot of papers which had been carefully tied up and heavily sealed.

"Have you found a will in your investigation?" asked Owlet.

"Not yet. We may find it yet; it may even be in this safe which has not been thoroughly explored. This sealed package—"

Mora stopped and looked at the package she held in her hand.

Her face lost color and Owlet saw a tremor sweep over her frame.

"My God! this is not the same package," she exclaimed as she tottered to a chair and sunk thereon. "It looks like the same, but the wax is not the same color as I can see now. The original package has vanished!"

"Since when?"

"Since yesterday," answered Mora, star-

ing first at what she held in her hand and then looking at the detective. "Some one besides me knows the secret of the safe in the wall."

She handed the packet to Orson Owlet who took it and held it in the strong light.

"You will see that the wax is not so very red. The one I took out of the safe yesterday was very red."

Old Owlet broke the seal without ado and let the papers thus secured fall out upon the table.

Mora uttered another cry of astonishment and then fell back again in the chair.

"Father would never have sealed up such things with such care," she exclaimed, pointing at what lay on the cloth. "You see that for the most part they are worthless bits of paper, not worth sealing up. The original package was valuable, and across it was written: 'To be opened at my last child's death.'"

"Let us look through the safe," remarked the detective. "You may have misled them."

"No, no! I know where I placed the sealed package, as if done but an hour ago."

Still Mora, with suddenly assumed calmness, came forward and assisted in looking through the safe.

"It is terribly true! This house has been visited by a robber within the last few hours," she said. "That person must have known the value of what has been taken. Orson Owlet, you must find Norma!"

The fair girl had sprung up and was clutching the old detective's arm. Her manner was excitement itself.

"Do you charge the maid with this theft?"

"Who else would know anything about the safe in the wall?"

"But the value of those papers?—how would Norma get at that?"

"Ask me not that. I believe she knew. Here yesterday, gone to day! The girl has vanished. She may or may not have recognized the English detective. I thought she did. You must find Norma!"

Orson Owlet stood on the pavement ten minutes after this scene.

The sun was beating down upon the stones and the busy life of Gotham roared around him.

Mora, standing among the curtains of one of the deep front windows was watching him with eager eyes and he saw her not.

"I don't know what to say about him," thought she. "Harold is still in the toils and this man has not found a single clue that promises to yield him anything. What is he, a true friend, or a plotter also? Can I trust him? I have told him so much. His eyes look me through at one moment and the next they are expressionless. I don't believe he is the man we want on the trail," and the curtains fell as Owlet walked away.

Mora went over to the table and sat down.

"I will try him a little longer; then, if he finds no links, I will employ one whose fame is world-wide. This mystery must be solved even if Harold reaps the whirlwind of its solution."

CHAPTER XIII.

POPSY TRIES TO KEEP HIS WORD.

WITH the eagerness of a beast of the jungle Popsy Vane waited for the coming of the man who had robbed him of the deadly potion.

He seemed to be hoping against hope, for many hours passed and no one came to his den but those who wanted their horoscopes cast and who had been his dupes for months.

The old man with the dark past—the one called up by the broken bracelet with its ruby setting—seemed to grow thinner while he waited for the handsome man.

Orson Owlet had told him that he had seen this same man, but had not told him where.

If he had given him this bit of information the secluded tiger might have left his lair long enough to hunt the man up and show him that he had robbed the wrong person.

So Popsy waited on, saw day give way to night and night, returning, throw her somber pall over the city.

If he came when would it be? Would he show himself by day or put off his visit till night when, like the robber he was, he expected to plunder him (Popsy) again.

Hetty in the mean time had called to say that the police had, as yet, found no clue to the crime of the Avenue.

The telephone girl had patronized Old Popsy, and he had taken a singular fancy to her, going so far as to tell her that his lore had no claims upon her purse.

Night had come again—the night that witnessed Harvey Hawk's interview with Carmel and Jack Noddles *alias* Costerman—and Popsy Vane, with a visitor still on the stairs, was waiting for his man.

"Orson said he was coming back—coming for something he will never get," mused the old man. "He said that he was coming to repeat his brigandish act in this room. Well, I'd give half I'm worth to see him here."

Would you Popsy? Would you give even a penny to bring that cool head to your door?

All at once the knob turned and the door opened.

If a dead enemy had risen from the grave in front of him the old charlatan would not have started more than he did then.

He fell back in his chair with a gasp. His under jaw dropped and his bulging eyes looked like walnuts over his colorless cheeks.

The man had come. The demon had returned.

Popsy Vane did not recover his breath for a little while. He looked like one frightened out of it for good as he stared at the man who still holding the knob leaned into the room and regarded him with a fiendish grin.

He shut the door carefully behind him and came in. There was no sound to his footsteps; he might have had cork soles for all Popsy knew.

Still eying him he advanced to the table and leaned over it as he rested his gloved hands on the frayed oil-cloth.

"Good-evening, Popsy," said he, his lips scarcely moving.

Popsy said something that sounded more like a growl than a salutation and then he fell to looking at the villain again.

"I hope you've enjoyed good health since I went away," continued the Unknown. "You look well; you're getting fatter."

This was sarcasm of the bitterest sort, but Popsy was not in the proper mood to enjoy it.

This time the caller did not sit down, though a chair was at his service. He threw one leg upon the table and half-mounted it as he proceeded:

"How's business, old man?"

"Pretty good," said Popsy, feeling his courage coming back as he caught second wind.

"You have a good trade?—better than you used to have in—say, in Seville?"

The old man recoiled.

"Don't you know—" he began, but suddenly checked himself.

"Oh, yes, I know. I wouldn't be here if I didn't, you see. You can bank on that, Popsy. That thing you gave me the other night was a failure. You trifled with me."

"I—I—"

"You did, sir; you trifled with me in cold blood!"

"I never trifle with any one, especially with my patrons."

"That's good. You qualify things as you go along, I see. But it was no good. I want the genuine article."

"You got it when you were here before."

"Come! I know what's good and what's false. It wasn't worth the paper it was wrapped in. You keep such stuff to deceive folks. It wouldn't have put a rabbit to sleep."

"But you accepted it and even paid for it."

"So I did—paid for it pretty well too, eh, Popsy? Did you take the ruby to a shop and realize on it? No, I guess not. That stone has a history not very dear to you, and yet you wouldn't part with it for the world."

Popsy shook his head.

All this time he felt his old resolution returning. He remembered his last words with Orson Owlet about this very cool head.

He had told the detective that he would inform him of the visit provided he did not strangle the rascal.

The Unknown ran his hand through the black mustache and continued to look down upon Popsy.

"You've got more over there," he said

with a gesture toward the cupboard set in the wall.

"Not a single paper."

"You don't hoodwink me that way. You had 'em when I was here before and you've got some yet. I want another philter."

"You played havoc with the first one."

"Do you think so, old Mephistopheles? Do you think I killed some one with your famous potion? That's what it was made for, eh?"

Popsy made no reply, but looked at the man.

"Come, I can't stay all night. I've got business elsewhere."

"I can't help that. I have nothing for you now."

"By heavens! I'll see for myself," and the man sprang from the table and started across the room.

"Just as you please," cried Popsy in an independent way. "You can see for yourself if you care to."

The old man's caller stopped midway between wall and table. He seemed to think that, after all, Popsy might have told the truth.

"You know where the little cupboard is, for you saw me open it once."

"Hang it all, you've got some infernal thing in there to turn the tables on those you don't like. You're an old scamp, Popsy Vane—as full of devilment now as when you escaped with your neck in Seville through a flaw in the web of justice."

Popsy was watching every movement of the man in the room. He regarded him with the air of a crouching tiger that waits for the gazelle to approach within reach of his claws.

"I'm not here to play like a child," suddenly cried the handsome Unknown. "I want another philter. Get up and open the cupboard yourself."

Popsy seemed to rise with an effort.

His legs seemed uncommonly stiff, and he groaned as he came around the table.

"You're getting old, sure enough," smiled the fellow. "I have seen you very supple; witness the night on the ship when you ran down the deck and leaped into the sea."

"Ha, ha, what a jump that was," laughed the old man. "I was supple then. You are right."

At the same time Old Popsy held out his arm.

"There was muscle there once," said he. "Feel it now."

The man with a curious smile ventured to do so, but the moment he touched Popsy's arm it went back like an arrow fitted to a bowstring, and the next moment a dark hand was launched forth and the Adonis-faced went toward the wall.

All this was the work of an instant, and before the struck one could right himself he was pounced upon by Popsy Vane with all the fury of a lion.

"You want another philter, do you?" he almost shrieked as he pulled his victim up and then jammed him mercilessly against the wall. "You shall have it and to your liking! I told him I would kill you if you ever came back, and here you are for death."

Not a word said the man in Popsy's grasp.

He was dragged across the floor and forced half dead as it seemed into the old astrologer's chair.

"Now, who are you?" demanded Popsy.

The answer was a look of cool defiance. The stranger seemed determined to keep inviolate his identity.

"You say you knew me in Seville?"

"I did."

"You have referred to my moonlight leap into the sea?"

"I saw you take it."

"Were you on the vessel at the time?"

"I was there!"

Popsy leaned closer still to his prey.

"What did you do with the other paper?" he asked.

"I have told you that it was worthless."

"Then why want another when all are alike?"

"You say you intend to murder me. I don't doubt it. It wouldn't be your first crime."

"Silence! I'll show you that some of those who come here for wool get shorn. You don't believe it? A while ago you called me old, but I am as young as ever. I

have tiger blood in my veins now as I had long ago."

The man in the chair told by his look that he did not doubt it.

He had seen enough of Popsy to believe it.

"Now you are to remain here while I go out," suddenly continued the astrologer.

He seemed to throw himself upon the handsome Unknown; he bore him back into the chair though the prisoner exerted all his strength, and in a jiffy he had cords fastened to the man's wrists and one which held his head back till it was immovable.

"I told Orson what I would do with you if you came back!" he hissed. "Why did you come back, fool?"

The man could not speak from the cruel cord, and Popsy crossed the room to the cupboard.

He took therefrom a long green bottle with which he approached the table.

Drawing the cork, he poured a lot of the contents of the bottle upon the cloth and wherever it touched it left a dark red stain.

The city Adonis watched these proceedings with breathless interest.

Popsy took good care not to get any of the liquid on his hands nor upon the garments of his victim. He strung it along the edge of the table making miniature rivers there till he had nearly exhausted the fluid.

After this he replaced the bottle in the cupboard and came back once more.

"Who are you, anyhow?" he eagerly questioned as he bent over the doomed man.

"That is one of the secrets I can die with," was the stubborn reply.

"It is, eh? Curse you! you shall perish with it then. You will keep your identity, yet you have partially assured me that you have seen me in other lands and under other suns. See! I light a match. All I have to do is to throw the match upon the table. Magic and fate will do the rest."

The little thing was burning in Popsy's hand and he held it over the red rivulet on the oil-cloth.

"For the last time, who are you and what did you want with the philter?" asked the old man.

A low, devilish laugh parted the lips of his victim.

"Go ahead and do your worst. The coil is tightening and the match secures it!"

The old man started, but he threw the match upon the table. A foul smoke arose at once, and while it hid the handsome face and almost choked Popsy himself, he fell back from the table and flinging open the door, left the Unknown to his terrible fate.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MAGIC OF A NAME.

OLD Popsy Vane stood on the sidewalk a moment and looked up at the windows of his den.

He could imagine the man in the chair suffering in the terrible fumes of the liquid; he could see him in his mind's eye perishing by inches in the old place, and all at once, eager to get away from the spot, he fled as if a legion of police were at his heels.

Not once again did he look back as he skimmed over the pavement, but continued on until at last he entered a little Park and dropped half dead upon a bench in a secluded corner.

There for the first time since his flight he took a long breath. There in the shadow of the trees and away from the glittering lamps he hid himself from mortal man and thought of what he had done.

There would be no fire in his room; Popsy knew that.

The man would simply die of suffocation and as he had locked the door, when he went back he would find the villain dead and done for for good.

No more would he hold over his head the threat that had paled his cheeks; no more would he talk of the Seville secret nor of his (Popsy's) leap into the sea.

One rascal had settled his accounts in this world and had entered another to answer for the crimes done here.

Old Popsy sat there an hour.

Now and then some one flitted past and left him unobserved.

"Ha, I told Orson that if the wretch came back I would likely do him up," grinned the old man on the bench. "I have kept my word and by this time he is done for."

Then he thought of another thing and started.

What should he do with the body?

What if it should be found by some one else and the deed fixed upon him?

That would be a catastrophe which would give him additional trouble and give him a notoriety which would not be enviable.

Popsy Vane started up at last.

He had been longer away from his den than for months before.

The Park seemed to be losing interest for the people, for fewer came his way, and it was only now and then that he heard any one on the graveled walks or caught sight of a human figure.

He resolved to go back.

It was all over by this time; the liquid had done its work and he knew what would greet him when he opened his door.

Back over the same ground went the astrologer; he dodged in and out among the shadows and at last stood at the foot of his stairs.

"Come, Popsy, old boy," said he to himself. "You should show more nerve than this. Don't play coward now that you have just played hero. Go up and do the rest."

He mounted the steps and paused at the door. All was still within.

He did not try the door to see if it had been opened since his departure but inserted a key and heard the bolt click as it went back.

Something at this moment seemed to tell Popsy that all was not right in the room beyond.

He hesitated at the door, but at last he pushed it open. A foul odor came from the room.

With bulging eyeballs the old man looked into his den, but saw no one at the table.

"Heavens! the rascal's got away," and he tottered across the floor to stop at the chair where he had left his victim, but he was not there.

For a moment Popsy Vane could not realize that the rat had got out of the trap, nor could he imagine how he had escaped.

There was a dark red stain on the oil-cloth where the infernal fluid had run, but the chair was empty enough.

The cords with which he had fastened the man in the chair were severed, but he could not tell by what means.

The Unknown was gone!

Old Popsy sat down with a groan.

He seemed to see in that man's escape the ruin of all his hopes and the overthrow of his cherished plans.

What would not that villain do now?

What would be his next play when he should turn on him (Popsy) with all the fury of a tiger?

When the bolt would fall he knew not nor from what part of the sky it would come.

"What if he ransacked the place," suddenly thought the old man. "He did this, no doubt, but he may not have found the secret places in my den."

During the next few moments Popsy Vane busied himself in finding out what had followed the victim's release. He searched the place, opening here and there secret compartments ingeniously set in the wall, and peered eagerly into each to see if the hunting hand had rifled them.

At each one he took hope.

The handsome Unknown knew nothing of the secret niches; he did not know where to look for them even if he had remained in the den after his release and Popsy continued to take hope.

"But I can't stay here with that man at large," said he. "He will play a hand destined to get the best of me and he will come back some day so armed that I will not be able to withstand him. No, I must go. I must give up everything here and become a fugitive once more. I must go away."

Once more he made ready for flight, but this time with more deliberation. He realized that henceforth he would become a fugitive, fleeing from an avenging hand and

one that would strike and spare not, for he had tried to kill its owner.

Popsy got a few things together and hid them in his bosom or otherwise about his person.

The rest he would destroy and in a manner which would not give his enemies any clue to what their secret had been.

These articles he collected on the stained table. He poured over them a reddish liquid and threw a blazing match upon the heap.

He stood at the door till he had seen a bluish flame eat up one half of the pile; he saw it dwindle away until the destruction of the whole was assured.

Not until then did he turn away. He shut the door behind him and locked it, and with the key in his pocket he went down stairs and out into the night once more, but not this time to turn his steps toward the Park.

But this time Popsy Vane was followed.

A figure half hidden near the entrance to the charlatan's den saw him come out and when he moved off he had a man at his heels.

The tracker did not much resemble the person he had lashed to the chair, though he was of the same size. He had the same quick and noiseless tread, and as he moved along, with his eyes fastened upon his prey, Popsy though he looked back saw nothing of him.

The old man crossed the city to the other side.

The river was near by and he would soon stand on the pier.

Suicide was the last thing in Popsy's mind; he had not reached that moment of despair and when he came in sight of the river he stopped and thrust his hand into his bosom.

The little packet that was withdrawn when the skeleton hand emerged was firmly clutched, and with a springy step the old man approached the water.

Far out into the stream he threw that which he clutched and saw it strike the waves to vanish instant.

"Well, they won't find that," said Popsy. "That's one of the secrets the river will keep and all the rascals this side of perdition can't bring it up again to frighten me. So far so good. Now I can seek the one friend I have left."

Once more he turned back and flitted again through shadow and lamplight with the gliding figure after him.

"Orson will be surprised to see me and he won't believe all my story," he thought aloud. "I will tell Orson about some things, but I guess I had best keep to myself my adventure with that good looking demon."

Half an hour later Old Popsy ran up a flight of steps in another part of the city and rapped at a door.

There was no response and he repeated his raps.

"Not at home, eh?" he said. "Maybe he will come before long and I have no other place to go just now."

He found the hall which ran past Owlet's door deserted and quite dark, and sneaking down it to the end he hugged the wall and waited for the detective.

An hour passed, but no one came.

"It may be an all night job," thought Popsy, "but I am in for it. Orson will give me shelter and the man who escaped me won't think of looking for me here."

Perhaps not.

At last some one came up the steps and stopped in the hallway.

Popsy's keen eyes caught sight of the figure and with the name of Owlet on his lips he went forward.

The man he had seen was at the detective's door.

Old Popsy was about to make his presence known when a cold chill rushed over him and he fell back with a half-smothered cry on his lips.

The man was not Old Owlet for he was listening like an assassin at the door.

Popsy Vane stopped within a few feet of the portal and watched the lone man.

He fancied that he could see an eager face and a pair of glittering eyes close to the lock.

Eagerly itched the old man's long fingers; he trembled with subdued excitement, but held back as his breath came and went in short gasps.

At length the one at the door rose and

stood erect. Popsy made a silent note of the figure, all the time expecting to be discovered himself and only wondered why this was not so.

Suddenly the stranger turned.

"He can't be in," Popsy heard him say. "He can't have come home yet, so there's no use trying to get to him. Another time will do; yes, another time."

The speaker had turned away when Popsy moved.

This movement, involuntary on the old man's part, betrayed him, for in an instant the strange man turned.

"Who are you?" he hissed, coming toward Popsy with the suddenness of a leopard's leap. "Are you a spy on me?"

The man of philters stepped into the middle of the hall and threw up his hands.

"I am no spy, but you are one!" he cried. "You have been sneaking about that door and you mean evil."

"That's all right and what mean you here, I would like to know?"

Popsy thought he caught sight of something in the man's hand as he spoke, but he was not sure; it seemed to glitter, but he did not wait for the assault.

With the sudden spring of an animal he went toward the unknown, caught the uplifted hand and then thrust its owner against the wall.

Desperation lent the old man unnatural strength. He seemed to possess the powers of a fiend incarnate for he held his enemy against the wall and choked him till something fell from his hand to the floor and remained sticking there at Popsy's feet.

"I'll show you how to play spy!" cried Popsy. "I am more than an old man with horoscopes, but I'll cast yours to-night with my hands at your throat for dead men tell no tales!"

The other struggled; he tried to break loose from the desperate grip of the old astrologer, but Popsy prevented him, and all at once he tore him from the wall and bore him headlong to the steps.

"Down you go with a broken neck!" hissed the old charlatan. "They'll find you dead on the sidewalk and the Morgue will get another tenant. Good by, spy!"

The man, somewhat smaller than Popsy, was in midair and the design of the astrologer could not be mistaken.

"Do your worst, but if you do it remember that you will never see Tina! I will die with the secret untold."

Old Popsy fell back and the man dropped from his fleshless fingers in the twinkling of an eye.

In another moment he had sprung to the stairs and with a laugh vanished down the steps toward the pavement.

CHAPTER XV.

HETTY AND MORA.

BARLOW & BARLOW, brokers, were enjoying a little sensation, for Hetty Hits, their telephone girl, had resigned her position, and they had also discovered that she was the person connected with Harold's quarrel with his father.

The firm had received a neat note from Hetty resigning and saying briefly that she preferred to remain with her mother whose health was none of the best; but the gentleman whose startling message had thrown the girl into a faint came forward with the information that she was the remote cause of the murder.

Barlow & Barlow accepted the resignation, but with regrets, and Hetty held their letter in her hand as she looked over at her mother to whom she had just read it.

"Well, I am out of that place," said she with a faint smile. "I shall not be annoyed any more and I can now devote more of my time to you."

"Another thing, you will not be followed again by the stranger whom you have seen several times of late watching you, and that will be a relief."

Hetty was about to reply when she was summoned to the door by a light rapping and she opened it to see a veiled woman there.

In another moment Hetty gave vent to a slight exclamation of surprise when the veil was raised and she looked into the pale but beautiful face of Mora.

Mora Esty had called on her brother's sweetheart for a double purpose, and Hetty smiled as she thought of this.

She conducted Mora to her mother and introduced her, after which, feeling that the two desired to be alone, she withdrew.

Mora looked for a moment into Hetty's eyes and seemed to read the feelings of her heart, for she suddenly, as if inspired by a good impulse, put out her hand and took Hetty's.

"I know everything," said she, "but I do not come to you with any feelings of resentment. We should be friends, no matter what has happened, and Harold shall know that we intend to do all we can for him in this his hour of darkness and danger."

Hetty felt the sincerity of these words; she saw beaming from Mora Esty's eyes love and sympathy, and she resolved at that moment to stand by Harold's sister through all her sorrows and griefs.

They could grieve together; they could feel the same sorrows and work in the same cause. While their natures might not be congenial in all respects, they need not let little things separate them, and Hetty, reared in poverty, believed that love would burn away the barriers between them, and that in the end they would stand on an equal footing, and find in each other a friend in need.

Mora informed Hetty Hitts of Norma's fight, and mentioned the detective's visit.

"Then you have seen him?" exclaimed the telephone girl, with a start of pleasure. "You have mentally measured Orson Owlet, the man of trails. What do you think of him?"

"I hardly know. At one time I was willing to trust him, but to me he seems one of those human mysteries which may not be for our good. I almost distrust this man."

"But I do not," cried Hetty, frankly. "I believe that Harold's welfare can be in no better hands than his. Owlet I know, and he is a strange man. He is an ideal ferret, one of the very best, and he has tracked men all over the world. In short, he must be a born detective, and he keeps his secrets like a Sphinx."

"I can see that," answered Mora. "He seems to look into one's very heart and his eyes, so piercing yet not expressive—they seem almost dead at times—must have set me against him."

"We have no one else to trust," replied Hetty, quickly. "We must rely on this strange man who has never failed to find the right clue, though it may take him some time."

"The other man whom I hate—I cannot help that, you know—is more agile. He is a detective by training, but he is a terrible one, for look what he has done."

"Yes, the Englishman," was the exclamation. "He is the man who says he found the dagger in Harold's drawer. This man—this Briton, Jack Noddles—did it ever occur to you, Mora, that he may be an impostor?"

"I have thought of that."

"He may be what he represents himself, but at the same time he may be a villain of the deepest dye."

"Would not a cablegram to London settle that matter? He says he belongs to the detective force there—that he is a member of the celebrated Scotland Yard band. I almost made up my mind this morning without any advice to send a dispatch to London asking if one Jack Noddles is a detective."

"The detectives of New York who are chagrined over what he has done may have thought of this. Owlet suspects the man."

"Then, let Owlet send the cablegram," said Mora.

"That will do. He shall do this, if it has not been done already. I will see Owlet."

Mora was silent a moment.

"I believe that he has turned his attention to Norma, my maid," said she. "The sudden flight of the girl and the robbery of the secret safe seems to turn suspicion against her, and while Owlet did not disclose his thoughts while he stood before the open safe, I am sure he will look for Norma."

"And she will be a good one if she escapes him!" exclaimed Hetty with enthusiasm.

The interview between the two women came to an end an hour later. They stood together at Hetty's door with their hands clasped and their faces near each other.

"For Harold we must work," said Mora.

"We must know nothing from now but his rescue from the fate that impends. We must stand by him through thick and thin."

"Forever!" echoed Hetty. "Harold shall escape the snares of the conspirators. He shall come out of the shadows free and proven guiltless. You and I, Mora, will not cease our efforts a moment till that end has been reached. No doubting his innocence for an instant and no turning from Orson Owlet, the man of trails and clues—the firm friend of the innocent and the avenger of crime."

"It shall be as you say as to Owlet. I will doubt him no longer," returned Mora Esty. "You would not trust in an incompetent in a thing like this. I feel that I already know you too well for that. I will never again doubt the honesty of this detective."

They parted at the door and Hetty's cheek glowed for several moments under the touch of Mora's lips.

Wealth and social position had proved no barrier between their hearts, and though one had a million and the other but a few dollars, they were friends and engaged in the avenging of the same man's murder.

Half an hour later Hetty Hitts found herself on the streets of New York.

She knew that Barlow & Barlow must have heard of her indirect connection with what had already been termed "the Esty Affair" for her name had appeared in the newspapers as if no one can escape the work of the prying reporters.

She made her way down the street conscious that some who seldom took notice of her now eyed her with curiosity for she had become something in the public eye.

Hetty's present mission was to Owlet's room, and in a short time she reached the door to find it not only closed and locked but to see a bit of paper tacked thereon.

Leaning forward the 'phone girl read that the detective had vacated the old room.

She fell back with a half suppressed cry.

"Gone! Vacated the room?" she exclaimed. "There must be some motive for this. He gave me no hint of this. He keeps his secrets, I know, but he said that whenever I wanted anything of him to come to this place."

But there was the little paper informing her that the room was not only vacant, but for rent.

For half a minute Hetty Hitts stood before the door unconsciously reading the placard again and again and at last, with the mystery as deep as ever, she moved away.

She went to a building in the immediate neighborhood and entered a small office where a dudish-looking clerk waited for her to speak.

"When did Mr. Owlet vacate?" asked Hetty.

The young man looked over his gold-rimmed glasses and smiled.

"Want his services, eh?"

Miss Hitts's eyes instantly brightened with indignation.

"I asked when he vacated," she answered.

"The other matter cannot interest you."

"Ah, I did not know. Most of those who seek a detective have business with him. By the way," he picked up a newspaper on the desk and glanced at it. "See, they've made a pretty fair picture of you."

He held the sheet forward and Hetty saw with a blush and a start her own portrait in in one of the columns, and above it several headlines that referred to "new developments" in the Esty Affair.

She waved the newspaper aside and looked at the clerk.

"You have not answered me," she said.

"When did Mr. Owlet vacate?"

"To-day, I believe. Is he working up the case?"

The young man's impudence was too much for Hetty Hitts. She rose and walked toward the office door.

"That, sir, is for those who are really interested. I don't see how anything, even a murder, could interest one of your caliber," and with this Parthian shot the telephone girl departed, leaving the clerk to hold the fort alone.

Old Owlet gone.

Hetty stopped to reflect over the new turn of affairs.

She felt that his vacating the room was

but a play of his in the great game of mystery which had opened in Payton Esty's room.

Owlet was one who would play some strange hands; he would keep his own secrets and those not in them would never know what he was doing till the work had been done.

Hetty wanted to see Owlet.

She wanted to tell him of Mora's visit and to suggest the sending of a cablegram to London to establish Jack Noddles's connection with the Scotland Yard detectives or to prove that statement false.

There seemed nothing left her but to go back home. She had failed to find Orson Owlet and she did not care to remain on the street since her portrait had given her additional notoriety, and she was likely to be pointed out everywhere as "the woman in the case."

It was a very unpleasant fame for Hetty Hitts and after quitting the real estate office she turned her steps homeward.

On her way she came to a little eating and lunch house which she had patronized before and feeling somewhat faint she resolved to enter and indulge in a cup of coffee.

In another moment she was seated at a table in a modest corner waiting for her order and while she waited she picked up a newspaper lying on the table.

That picture of herself was the first thing she saw and with a smile she began to read.

"The woman in the case" read on until her coffee came when she laid the newspaper aside and began to sip.

All at once some one dropped into a chair at the nearest table and, with a glance at Hetty, reached over and picked up the relinquished journal.

Hetty saw that he was a good-looking man, but she saw more than this.

He was the same person who had followed her and whose face she had seen last in the street from the window of her home.

The spoon almost fell from the girl's hand as their eyes met, and while she held her breath, the man, leaning forward, said in low eager tones:

"Don't let me cause you any fright, miss. I merely dropped in here unaware of your presence. You are Miss Hitts—the lady rather profusely referred to in the newspapers just now. They can't print your face as pretty as it is—that is impossible."

Hetty pushed back her chair indignant, but the man with a grin continued as he clutched her wrist:

"Don't get elicky now, girl. You don't know me and it may be well that you don't. I can tighten the noose around his neck, but you can save him if you listen to me, that's what you can!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A WOMAN OF SPIRIT.

HELD in the grip of the strange man, Hetty Hitts stared at him wondering at times if it was not all a dream; but he was looking into her face with a pair of eager and flashing eyes, and she realized that it was really an encounter in real life.

"I don't care to save him through you," she said, her indignation still uppermost.

"You don't, eh? Well, you're a strange girl."

"Strange or not; it is true—I don't care to see him go scot free if you are to be his rescuer."

She felt that this man had something repulsive in his make-up though he was handsome and sleek. He resumed at once:

"We are not alone, but no one will hear us," he lowered his voice a bar. "You have heard what I said awhile ago. You can save him if you are not too stubborn. You've got your name in the newspapers; but you don't seem to like the notoriety."

"It is annoying," said Hetty.

"To be sure it is. I wouldn't like it myself."

"Of course you wouldn't, but a man could put up with it better than a woman."

"Do you think so? Well, I don't know. But let's come to the matter in hand. You're pretty; but I've already told you that."

Hetty made no reply.

"This thing has driven you away from your job, but no matter. You can get a better."

"I don't want another. I am satisfied with the needed rest."

"You are? Well, he is in the toils—captured as slyly as ever a man was caught."

"But he is innocent."

"You think so. That's all right. He's in a bad box all the same. You can't get him out of it unaided."

"You don't know."

"I do know," and he leaned back and laughed a low, irritating laugh. "I would like to know how you would proceed unaided. It can't be done, girl. He's in for it. But see here."

Hetty felt that others were looking on, but she could not move.

"As I have said, I can help him, but only on a promise from you. We won't carry out the bargain here. It's not the place for bargains. It's too public. I am going out. You will follow me."

He released her hand and Hetty breathed free once more. But she made no reply to his last words.

"You understand me," said he. "You can't escape me, no matter what you do. I hold him in my hands. His welfare and yours belong to me, Miss Hetty. Gods! how pretty you are."

Hetty fell back again indignant; this was too much.

"I refuse to listen!" she cried, the flush mounting to her temples. "I will not have anything to do with a bargain of the kind you hint at."

She pushed her chair back and got up. He did not move, but transfixed her with his keen eyes and seemed to smile derisively.

"You can't help it, I tell you," he whispered. "You can't get out of the toils and he shall stretch hemp no matter if he has a thousand Owlets on the trail."

Who was this man?

Hetty looked now at the handsome, cool head, knowing nothing of Popsy Vane's visitor, else she might have answered her mental question.

"You're going, eh?" continued the stranger. "We'll meet again and when we do you'll be willing to come to terms. I hold his fate and yours in my hands."

"You may think you do, but you are powerless to rescue him."

"Beware! You don't know me, as I have said. You may feel my hand before long."

"You intimate that you know who the guilty party is. You seem to say, though you haven't mentioned a name, that you know who killed Payson Esty."

He merely laughed a little.

"Maybe you're the one," Hetty went on.

"Do I look like a murderer?" and he leaned back in the chair and swelled up like a toad as he looked up at Hetty Heilo.

The telephone girl said no more, but with another look walked away.

The air of the little restaurant seemed very close to her. Her heart was beating fast and she wanted to get out into the purer atmosphere.

She did not look back to see what had become of her persecutor. He might still be in his seat, or he might be at her heels—she did not know; she wanted to be out of the place.

Hetty reached the side-walk, but not until she had run the gantlet of prying eyes, all of which seemed to recognize her as the sweetheart who was being held responsible for Payson Esty's murder, and when she started off with her face turned toward home she felt relieved.

As for the man who had come before her so suddenly, he remained at the table until Hetty had gained the sidewalk when he came forward.

His dark eyes had a mischievous twinkle and a smile appeared for a moment at the corners of his mouth.

"Maybe I acted a little too fast," said he to himself, "but I couldn't help it. She's prettier than the other, if she hasn't got her money, and as for Carmel—she's too ancient for me, yes, decidedly too ancient."

Hetty near the entrance to the little place passed a face she did not know, but when the man came out the owner of this same face stopped him.

"Carmel?" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said the woman, whose eyes suddenly glowed with a brilliant light. "I

want you. Come, the cab is over yonder, and I will talk while we ride."

He hesitated, sending after Hetty's vanishing figure an eager glance, but the hand of Carmel kept his arm in thrall.

"This is not altogether luck," she went on. "I saw you in this street awhile ago, and I thought I'd wait for you. You know what has happened?"

He looked at her but made no reply.

"Wait till we're in the carriage," Carmel resumed. "It is something important."

She conducted him to a cab which stood in the gutter a few feet away, and they stepped inside.

Carmel pulled the door shut and gave an order to the man on the box.

Away went the vehicle, and the woman bent suddenly toward the dark mustache and said, hoarsely:

"Boyd's left the game!"

His reception of this information was a violent start, and he looked incredulously at Carmel, like one in a maze.

"You don't mean to tell me this?" he exclaimed. "What, left the game?"

"That he has."

"What for?"

"What do you think?"

The man seemed to reflect.

In another moment he shook his head, all the time looking straight into Carmel's eyes.

"Boyd's heart is cowardly. That man has shown the white feather just when we are about to grasp the stakes."

"Did you tell him so?"

"I didn't get the chance. He gave me the slip."

"You don't mean to say that he has sloped?"

"Boyd is gone."

"Run off?"

"Yes."

"When did he go?"

"Last night."

"At what hour?"

"Between eleven and daybreak."

"Which way did he go?"

Question and answer came fast as the cab rattled over the stones of Gotham.

"I don't know that, but we might find out."

"Does Jack know this?"

"Jack knows."

"Well?"

"Jack has his hands full now, you know. He is wanted right here where so much depends on his coolness."

"Yes, yes; you are right, Carmel."

A moment's silence followed the last words, Carmel looking out in the interval.

"Now you can guess why I wanted to see you?" she went on. "You must know now that I had to find you, Harvey."

He nodded, but did not speak.

"You must find Boyd and the girl."

He started up and seemed to bend suddenly toward the woman on the opposite seat.

"What girl?" he cried.

"The maid."

"Norma?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I see," and he fell back again. "I see now. He took Norma with him, eh?"

"He did, the villain!"

Carmel's answer seemed to come through clinched teeth.

"I want you to follow them. You know how to track people, Harvey."

There was no reply.

"You don't fear Captain Coynningham?" asked Carmel.

"No."

"I thought not," she cried, well pleased. "If I had thought so I would not have hunted you up. You haven't a vestige of fear about you—no cowardice in your blood. You can start at once. I think I can put you on their trail. But we will talk of that at the house."

"Why not let them go?"

Instantly Carmel's eyes blazed.

"Let them get away with the secret?" she exclaimed. "Why, man, don't you think of the future? Have you no feelings of safety? Let them go? He would sell us out and perhaps to the detectives."

"I don't think Captain Coynningham would do that."

"I know him. Then, he has broken the oath of the Red Circle. He has deliberately deserted us and just when we needed most

to stand together—he runs away like a coward and takes with him a girl who will play false at his bidding."

By this time the cab had reached a certain house and Carmel opened the door. She sprang out and Harvey Hawk followed her up the steps and into the place.

They entered the parlor where we have seen them before and there she turned on him with the quickness of a cat.

"Here, read this letter. This may be a clue," and she placed in his hands a letter which she took from her desk. "You will find them in Philadelphia if you look right. They won't hide there long; of course not, but long enough for you to play out your hand—to make it hot for the traitor and his partner. Go at once. I won't detain you. You know what the reward will be. All my love has turned to hatred and I can turn from Captain Coynningham and give my heart to the man who avenges me."

She almost pushed Harvey Hawk toward the door, her eyes fairly flashing, and he looked at her like a man suddenly awakened from a sleep.

"He must have been preparing for this flight. He lost this letter yesterday and I picked it up. No.—Race street, Philadelphia; you can find the place, Harvey. They are there. Go and carry out the vengeance of the Red Circle. Go now."

The handsome man was in the hall when he said:

"You know what I have lately passed through. I am not over that yet. I had a narrow escape from Popsy Vane's diabolism. I've been within the fringes of hades; but—"

"Tell me about it when you come back. Go, go! Find the pair and slay the traitor; silence the girl, too. You must do that to triumph. I will reward you when you come back. Go."

Carmel shut the door on him and he was alone.

CHAPTER XVII.

OLD OWLET'S NEW LINK.

MORA ESTY was right when she told Hetty that she believed that Owlet intended to pay some attention to Norma her maid.

The maid's flight and the robbery of the secret safe in the wall seemed connected in Orson Owlet's mind.

But there was another thing to look after and he felt that it should be neglected no longer.

The body of Payson Esty, the murdered millionaire, had been deposited in the family vault, a fine affair into which the dead man had put a good deal of money.

Old Popsy Vane had told him that the deadly philter left behind a sign which the shrewdest toxicologists could not detect unless they were in the secret.

But if the millionaire had been stabbed to death—and the coroner's jury had said he had—why look for the marks of a secret poison?

Orson Owlet not long after his last interview with Popsy might have been noticed on his way to Greenwood.

He was armed with a permit which would open the casket that contained the corpse of Payson Esty and in due time he entered the cemetery.

Driven to the vault, the iron door opened to him and he and an attendant stood in the gloom that prevailed there.

There was one other coffin in the place—that which contained the body of the millionaire's wife, long since crumbled to dust—and the newest one was approached.

The light that burned threw a weird light over the scene, and Owlet stood silent beside the casket while the lid was being removed.

Impassive at all times, he showed now no signs of excitement, but waited in patience till the last screw should have been removed.

"I'm done, sir," said the man who worked at the coffin.

"Remove the upper lid and step outside, please," replied Old Owlet.

The attendant did so and Owlet waited till the man was gone.

Then he lifted the lantern and stepped to the side of the casket.

He bent over it as he held the light in such a position that it fell upon the white face of the murdered man.

Old Owlet put his hand into the coffin and turned the head a little.

It was a smooth face, but ghastly in every feature and outline.

He held the light almost into the coffin.

"It is there. I see it!" he said half aloud. "The sign is here as plainly as if it was marked in red."

He touched the dead man's cheek with his finger, tracing out as it were an imaginary line half-way across it toward the ear.

"No decay here for months," he went on. "The sign will remain. Old Popsy some day shall make all clear and the guilty will be punished."

Again he held the lantern lower and studied the face for several minutes longer.

Standing in a certain position he saw nothing; but again in another the sign of the philter was to be seen.

It and not the stab in the throat was the sign of murder.

"This man was dead when the dagger struck him," muttered Orson Owlet. "He was the victim of the potion, not the prey of the dagger. I have to prove this. If I fail Harold Esty reaches the noose. If I succeed some one else will. I will not fail!"

He spoke with an emphasis that came back to him in an echo of the charnel-house, and stepping to the door of the vault he signaled the man outside.

Five minutes later the coffin had been closed again, and the detective was riding back to the city.

He went back to Mrs. Larrigan's as Cyrus Delafield, found that querulous dame at home and told her that he was called out of the city for a day or two and might not be back even then; on the other hand he might not go at all—it was even chances anyhow—and then he asked her if she had seen anything more of Costerman, the flute-player.

Mrs. Larrigan had not seen him, and she lamented his departure; saying that she really missed his playing as it seemed to rid the house of rats.

Old Owlet went down the stairs with a reflective face.

"Now a little chase after Norma," he said to himself. "The girl who gave Mora the slip lately ought to be looked after."

In the first place he went down to look after Popsy Vane, but did not find that worthy at home. In fact, everything looked to him as if the old man's den had been suddenly abandoned, and Owlet turned back.

He turned up some hours later in the little room in Mrs. Larrigan's house, not having struck the trail sought. Norma had vanished sure enough; but there was yet another hope.

He went up to the Esty mansion and met Mora again.

The dead millionaire's daughter mentioned at once her idea of telegraphing to London to see if Jack Noddles really belonged to Scotland Yard.

Owlet seemed to smile at the girl's forethought.

"Don't you think it would be a good move?" asked Mora anxiously.

"It might be tried, miss, but a cablegram might rouse the fellow's suspicions, especially if he should have any friends in Scotland Yard—"

"I see, I see," interrupted Mora with a faint laugh. "It would not do at all. Let us drop it."

And they did.

"With whom did your maid correspond?" asked the detective.

"With precious few people," was the reply. "She never cared for letter writing. I don't know that she wrote a dozen letters in a year. And what is stranger still, she seldom wrote herself. She used to get a friend to write for her."

"But she could write?"

"Oh, yes; Norma could write well as far as chirography was concerned; but the manual part of letter writing she never encouraged."

"Who was this friend who did that for her?"

"A young girl somewhere on the next street, I believe."

"Do you know her name?"

"Norma never told me this much, but I discovered it accidentally."

"Well?"

"Her name is Hester Lacroix, and I think she is French."

"Lacroix is French enough," said Old Owlet. "Have you the number?"

"Hester is but a maid like Norma, and her name would not appear in the Directory."

"Then you do not know the number."

"Unfortunately I do not."

"Hester Lacroix?" muttered Owlet to himself. "That is something to start with."

"You don't think that she shares Norma's secret?" cried Mora.

"I cannot say as to that. It is not likely that she does; but I shall hunt Hester up."

It turned out to be a short hunt, for at a small grocery on the next street Old Owlet by shrewd inquiries found out that Hester Lacroix was a maid in a wealthy family; not only this, but that she was to be seen in the Park every evening, for she was vivacious and proud of her *petite* figure and good looks.

It was near sundown when Old Owlet strolled into the Park and began to walk slowly up and down the broad walk near the entrance.

"Here she comes," he exclaimed as a girl came forward and seated herself on one of the settees.

"She was young and exceedingly pretty, Frenchified in dress and manners, and while the detective watched her, she took a ball of work from her pocket and began to crochet, all the time watching those who entered the Park."

Old Owlet watched her a few moments and then walked forward and took the other end of the settee.

Hester looked up, noticed him and returned to her double occupation.

"I beg your pardon, miss," said the detective. "I come from your friend, Miss Norma—ah, you know her?"

Hester assumed a look of astonishment and stopped knitting.

"Indeed, sir, you quite mystify me," she replied. "Miss Norma to be sure! I know no Miss Norma."

"What, not know the maid on the other street—the one who lived in the family of the man who was killed the other day?"

"I don't know her."

Hester Lacroix's lips closed with an emphasis that was intended to be final.

"That's strange. You are Miss Lacroix, aren't you?"

"I am Hester Lacroix."

"I was told that you would probably deny a few things. That's all right. Miss Norma sent me to say that she has gone off. Went last night, you know. Was sorry to have to go without seeing you; but it couldn't be helped. You used to write letters for her and I happen to know that you wrote them well. She may not come back for some time. Therefore you won't get to wield the pen for her soon."

"Where has she gone?" asked Hester, without thinking.

Owlet smiled; the girl had tripped herself.

"I think she has gone to her friends—the ones to whom you wrote, you know."

"Perhaps—the Philadelphia ones. I guess that must be so. She paid me well for those letters and I made some extra pin money that way."

"And you made it honestly certainly. Norma forgot to tell me the address of her Quaker City friends before she went away and I may want to write her, you see."

"Oh," said Hester, "I can supply their address from memory. I wrote it so often, you know."

"That's what I thought."

"Would you like it?"

"If you please."

Hester drew a little card from her pocket and with a fairy pencil traced thereon: "Mrs. Boutelle, No. — Race St., Philadelphia," and handed the same to the detective.

"You are very clever," said Owlet. "I shall try not to forget this favor. Norma would be very apt to go there."

"I think so. She told me that Mrs. Boutelle was a lady of refinement. Of course you knew that Norma was a waif—picked up a good many years ago and brought North by some one—I believe by Mrs. Boutelle, though I am not sure."

"You liked Norma, didn't you?"

Hester Lacroix shrugged her shapely shoulders just a little.

"I can't say that I really liked her," was her reply. "She was a strange girl. Had queer ways: could be as nice as you please and as sullen as—I don't know what. Still, for all this, she was companionable. She could write though."

"But you did that for her."

"Yes. She would never write a letter herself. She seemed to have a fear of letting any of her writing get abroad. It may have been a whim—I don't know. Still it was strange."

"The murder affected her a great deal."

"I haven't seen her since," was the reply.

"It was a bad piece of business, that murder."

The little French girl shuddered.

"It was terrible. *Mon dieu!* to think that they have the young man arrested for the crime. It looks bad for him, I am told. I have been watching ever since for Norma, and now you tell me that she has gone away. Well, she will come back, maybe."

Owlet again thanked Hester Lacroix for her kindness, after which he left her on the settee with her work, while he strolled off to quit the Park as soon as possible, with the point scored for which he had deftly played.

"I'll be keeping my word with Mrs. Larrigan if I go to Philadelphia," he thought. "Thanks to the little French maid, I'll run over to the Quaker City. The trail seems to lead in that direction."

It might be a futile chase; but Old Owlet seemed to think that Hester Lacroix had given him an important link in the Esty mystery.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

MR. JACK NODDLES, the so-called London Detective, had become for the time being a ncted man.

His discoveries made at the home of Payson Esty, the murdered millionaire, had secured for him a notoriety that reached beyond the limits of Gotham, and heralded his fame in other parts of the country.

A good many people began to inquire who this shadower was, and what crimes he had brought to light in the Old World.

No one doubted his identity.

Those who read of his prowess watched for him and stared at him when he appeared at the preliminary examination of Harold Esty, and gave in his testimony in a cool, straightforward manner.

He did not care to see a promising young man like Harold get into a terrible predicament like the one into which he had fallen; but it was his duty to tell the truth, and his duty, too, as a man-hunter to bring the guilty to justice.

Jack Noddles was the lion of the hour, and was correspondingly hated by the New York ferrets.

No one but Old Owlet had discovered that he and Costerman, the flute-playing roomer at Mrs. Larrigan's was one and the same person.

Perhaps no one suspected anything against the Briton, and therefore he had escaped very well.

Jack Noddles was having it all his own way.

On the evening of Owlet's interview with Hester Lacroix in the Park Jack entered a house in a respectable part of the city and took a seat in a room to the left of the hall.

He might have been keeping an appointment, for the man was well dressed and looked as sleek as a dude.

He was not permitted to remain alone very long in the room for he was soon joined by a woman who smiled to see him.

This personage was older than Jack Noddles and her eyes had a peculiar look which a suspicious man might have mistrusted.

"I heard you were in the city," said Jack, looking at the woman who was past forty and tall and well rounded. "You see I have been busy and have called at my first opportunity."

"I have heard," was the reply. "You are a little out of your sphere, aren't you?"

Jack smiled.

"I don't know," he replied in an off-hand

manner. "It is quite true that I am not in my old business, but after the experience I've had I don't care to follow it here. What I am at is paying me."

"No doubt of that. It is paying you better than the old business did I hope."

Jack seemed to start a little and the woman removed her eyes from him a moment.

"When did you come here?" he asked.

"I have been three months in the city."

"You have?" with a sudden start. "Why didn't you let me know?"

"I waited for you to find me out."

"That was hardly right, Sophy."

"Sophy?" smiled the woman. "That's not my name now. You needn't go back to old times when you speak to me. Sophy indeed! I'm Natalie, remember."

The London detective gave a surprised whistle.

"Oh, I see. You've buried the past so far as you can and you've taken another tack in life."

"Who had a better right to, tell me," was the reply. "But let's get away from this subject. You've scored a success, I hear."

"I am on the top wave."

"And the young man in the toils didn't do it at all, eh?"

"Of course he did," cried Jack. "Do you think I would go so far as to play the bold hand you hint at? I'm not the man to do that, no matter if I have been pretty bad in my time."

"I beg pardon. Then you have reformed."

There was sarcasm in the voice and another smile came to the lips of the woman who had called herself Sophy.

"I have news for you," she went on, leaning toward Jack Noddles. "I have a bit of intelligence that may astonish you."

"Out with it."

"In a moment. Tell me first what has become of the others."

"What others?"

"Cruel Coyningham, Harvey Hawk, as he is now called, and Carmel."

"They're not so far off, I guess."

"Are all in New York?"

"Perhaps."

"And in the game with you?"

"In what game?"

"Come, you cannot hoodwink Sophy, once your friend across the water when the Stars and Stripes couldn't save you from Dartmoor and the mark of the prison bird."

"You're inclined to be severe."

"But truthful all the same."

"I'll admit that if it will do you any good. They're all in New York. Now go on."

"So Carmel is here!" cried Natalie. "So she is still living and deep into the game that is being played. Is she as cool-headed as ever?"

"I guess she is."

"And Cruel Coyningham? Did he ever marry her?"

"No."

"But she loves him still, eh?"

"Perhaps she does."

Natalie was silent for a moment.

"You said you had something to tell me."

"So I have. You remember the man who helped to put you first in irons and then in the cell—the man who gave you a prison number—what was it, 26,999—"

"There were several engaged in that job."

"Yes, but the American ferret. The man who went over to Manchester and threw the coils around you."

"Of course I haven't forgotten him."

"He is here in New York."

Jack fell back in the chair and laughed.

"I thought you were to tell me something surprising," he chuckled.

Natalie looked chagrined.

"You knew it, then?" said she.

"Of course."

"And you let him remain alive to beat you once more. Is that the way you return the plays of the old past?"

"You don't know what I am doing."

"That is true."

"You don't know what I have been at all this time. Of course I know that Dunbar Vivier is in this city."

"It is not 'Dunbar Vivier' now."

"No. He sails under another name. He is now called Orson Owlet, the detective."

"And he is mixed up in this same case."

"I know that also," replied Jack. "I am aware that Orson Owlet has put his hand into the pudding in search of plums."

The woman seemed to draw back and look at Jack.

"I presume you intend to let him play his hand out," she exclaimed.

"I don't intend to do anything of the kind. Have you seen this man?"

"I've seen him."

"He might like to see you, too. You remember once in Piccadilly, the morning before I was brought over from Manchester, that he ran afoul of you and whispered in your ear."

"Just as if I forget such things!" cried Natalie. "I can hear him whenever I listen. What did he say that time? 'I spare you for this time, Sophy, for your mother's sake; but never cross my path again in any land.'"

"He said that, did he, and you are here in New York where he is."

"I am here, but, as you see, I am not running into his nooses."

Jack seemed to look at the woman with a strange expression of face.

She was rather pretty, but showed some signs of a dissipated life, and her long and shapely hands were very white.

"No," she went on. "I am not running my head into this man's dragnet, but you are, Jack."

"Do you really think so?"

"I know it. You are getting there pretty fast."

"Just as if I am not able to take care of myself!"

"You thought so years ago, but they came down on you with the darbies and you saw the inside of Dartmoor for six long years."

The man winced.

"It was Tartarus," he said.

"I know it must have been; this time it may be still worse than that. This is America your native land, but they won't spare you on that account."

"Natalie—by Jove! I'd like to call you Sophy if you'd let me—it's like old times—I'm glad to see you, but you persist in making me shiver."

"There's one way out of the pit and only one, Jack."

"Point it out."

"Your own judgment ought to show you the way. That man stands in it, boy, and you can't get around him. You must walk over Orson Owlet to immunity."

"There it is again," rejoined Jack Noddles. "How do you know that he has found me out?"

"That's a pointed question and you shall have a pointed answer. You have been playing a role which you hoped no one could see through. Just why you've played it I do not know, but you have been Mr. Costerman, and, then, you have been playing your flute."

"Oh I couldn't let up on that very long, Sophy."

"You'll play yourself into the net sure," was the reply. "Well, about Orson Owlet and yourself."

She stopped and went over to a shelf in the room. Taking something from it she came back to Jack.

"By the merest accident I discovered Dunbar Vivier on the street. Those eyes of his never change and they have the same light now as when that day in Piccadilly Circus he stopped me and spoke the terrible warning. I say I have seen him and I have followed him to Mrs. Larrigan's only to discover that you were housed there as Costerman, and that the accursed flute was giving you away all the time."

The listener smiled.

"He is there yet. Orson Owlet, as you call him, is still under Mrs. Larrigan's roof and he is there for a purpose."

"But I am there no longer as you see, girl."

"No, but now is our chance. Now is the time to strike a blow which shall rid you forever of this enemy who once sent you to Dartmoor with its infamous memories. We must not put off that blow."

Jack coolly took a cigar from his pocket, but Madame Natalie, as she called herself, laid her hand on his arm.

"We are near and dear to one another, Jack. We are brother and sister. I have crossed the ocean in search of you and I have found you at last. You are still in the hands of those people. You are still in the old gang headed by Cruel Coyningham and seconded by Harvey Hawk and Carmel. And what is worse still, you are suspected by Dunbar Vivier, now Orson Owlet the acknowledged prince of detectives and a man who never fails."

"He will score his first one soon."

"If you lie there inactive, no; if you rouse and strike like a lion, yes!"

Her eyes fairly flashed.

"It all lies with you, Jack," she went on.

"I don't say anything about the young man around whom you seem to have thrown a net of evidence. I know nothing about the merits of this great murder which has convulsed New York. You know more than any one perhaps. But I am here to say that unless the blow is struck at once the house you have reared in this country will crumble beneath the hands of Orson Owlet. I know also that Popsy Vane, so called, is an old acquaintance; but I don't fear him. We have a club which will silence that mumbling old wretch at any time; but the ferret is the dangerous man. He is the only one to be feared."

Jack seemed to rouse himself, for he threw the cigar away and stood erect.

"I believe what you say, Sophy," he exclaimed. "I feel that this man is dangerous."

"The sooner he is silenced the better. You are known as the London Detective. This man may inquire into such a claim."

"I have thought of that."

"The more reason why we should stand together and make way with him. I am not too old for work, Jack, though a good many years your senior. We never lose our tiger blood, at least I never do. Come, we know where the enemy is. I have told you that he is one of Mrs. Larrigan's roomers. What more need I say?"

Natalie turned toward the window and looked out into the street.

Jack watched her a few moments in silence.

They were brother and sister and he had not seen her for years. Their greeting had not been profuse; it was not Sophy's manner. She was cold, but crafty, cool and merciless, and he thought of their childhood while he looked at her.

"Well?" she said, turning suddenly.

"What are you going to do?"

"We will attend to the man in our way."

Her lips curled with triumph.

"That seals Dunbar Vivier's doom," was all she said, and then she looked away again.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT HETTY HELLO SAW.

MEANTIME Hetty Hitts had been accorded an interview with Harold in the Tombs whither he had been taken charged by the coroner's jury with murder in the first degree.

The telephone girl had much to say and the authorities, touched by her devotion, had left the two alone in Harold's cell.

It was the girl's first visit since his incarceration and the young man was glad to see her.

He asked after Mora who had been to see him once to assure him that all that keenness and love could do to solve the mystery was being done and Hetty hastened to confirm this.

But there was one thing near her heart and she came to it at once.

"Harold, that dagger is the worst thing against you," said she.

The young man started and lost color.

"The man who says he found it in your room says also that it was hidden in the bureau and that the linen over it bore some dark stains."

Instead of answering her Harold seemed to turn his face away.

"Was it your dagger, Harold?"

He looked at her and for a second sealed his lips but all at once he said:

"It was mine."

"Did you put it there?"

"I did."

Hetty Hello lost color now.

"But you—"

She stopped and caught herself.

"It can't be possible, Harold—"

She stopped again, but suddenly caught his arm and leaned toward him with a look of agony in her eyes.

"Did you have words with him that night? Did you and your father have an altercation that fatal time?"

"We had words, but they were not serious."

"It was about me again was it not?"

Harold bowed his head and was silent.

"I am to be your destruction," cried the girl. "I am to send you to your doom, Harold. Why did I ever see the light of day?"

"I am to blame as much as any one," was the reply. "I might have acted differently; I see it now, but what's done is done and we must put up with it."

"But that dagger and the missing letter which the officer could not find when he went to get it? Surely you can give some solution to these things."

"To the letter I have no solution. It was in the drawer when I saw it last; but the dagger—don't question me about that, Hetty."

Hetty Hitts seemed to draw back with a shudder and Harold turned his head away and trembled.

Was he guilty after all?

Had he committed that heinous crime and was the English ferret right in his arrest?

No wonder Hetty Hello shook when she looked at him.

"The dagger will finish you if you don't explain," she said. "It is the great point against you and you and you alone can clear it up."

He made no reply, and she came back to the same point with renewed courage.

"The matter has been placed in the hands of the best ferret in this or any other land," said she. "Orson Owlet to whom I sent you the very night of your arrest is on the trail and nothing escapes his drag-net. He is a man who gets what he goes after, and he has never failed, no matter how dark the mystery is."

"I have heard that."

"Don't you know that you can throw light into the darkest spot, Harold? Come out and tell all you know and Owlet's trail will not be so dark."

"Not now, Hetty."

"When, then?" eagerly asked the girl.

The prisoner shook his head.

"You don't know, or at least you won't say."

"I cannot speak."

"Mora is at work in her way," continued Hetty. "She will give herself no rest till the mystery has been solved."

"She told me as much when she was here. I am sorry for Mora."

Hetty groaned.

"Mora must not be held responsible. You ask me to explain about the dagger and the stained linen. The blade belonged to me. It was found in my drawer, but— Let me stop here, Hetty."

"Why not tell me all, Harold?"

"I prefer to keep that secret."

"And perish with it untold?"

"Perhaps."

The girl seemed to have reached the end of her efforts. She rose and looked down at Harold.

"But you will tell me one thing, won't you?" she suddenly exclaimed. "You will not keep that back from me, Harold. Did you commit the great crime?"

He sprang up and caught her hands and looking her in the eye he said:

"Do you think I did, Hetty?"

"I never thought so," was her reply. "I never will believe it, no matter what they prove."

Eye met eye while they stood face to face in the little cell, and Harold with a sudden impulse drew her toward him and imprinted a kiss on her forehead.

"You have my answer," said he as he released her. "Through thick and thin stand by me, Hetty. Let that detective work out the mystery if he can. I cannot speak."

It was with strange feelings that the telephone girl left the prison,

The mystery was as great as ever; yea, it seemed darker than before, for Harold had confessed to the ownership of the dagger, but had refused to tell any more.

And there had been a second quarrel. This was news to Hetty, and it had taken place on the night of the murder.

She went back home cast down and weakened by her visit to the man in the shadow.

The shadows were gathering round Gotham and after a brief rest Hetty went out again.

"I must see Owlet," said she. "I must keep looking for this man until I find him. He seems to have vanished, but I must not let him get far away. He must hear what Harold has said. The dagger was his; it was found in his drawer by the Englishman. Why didn't he hide it elsewhere?"

She made her way to Orson Owlet's well-known den, but the man had not retaken the place.

The sign "To Let" still hung on the door and Hetty had to turn away.

She resolved to turn her face toward Mora's home and in a short time she arrived there.

The mansion which had of late obtained such startling notoriety was almost dark, but Hetty rung the bell.

The door was opened by a new servant who had already taken Norma's place, and the telephone girl slipped inside.

She was told that Mora was up-stairs and Hetty said she would run up and see her there.

She soon found herself on the landing above and turned toward Mora's room.

All at once, however, she stopped and fell back against the wall for Mora was seen approaching with stealthy tread and white face.

The hour was not late, but the girl must have retired, for she was clad in a long night robe which was as white as her own fair face.

"She will see me in a moment," thought Mora, as she held her breath, standing against the wall watching Mora all the time. "She will actually run against me."

As Mora came near Hetty observed a strange cast of countenance and the odd look in the half-closed eyes.

Mora was a sleep-walker and Hetty while she watched her felt an uncanny feeling take possession of her soul.

On, on she came, seemingly in possession of all her senses and the watching girl saw her advance to the door of her father's room.

"But once have I crossed the threshold of that room and then Mora took me thither and told me there the story of the crime as she knew it," said Hetty to herself. "And now, Mora, asleep, is entering that chamber and she may give me a link for Orson Owlet's chain."

It was a strange thought to enter Hetty Hello's head, but it came unbidden and she could not root it out.

The door was shut behind the somnambulist, but not locked, for Hetty listened to hear the key click and failed to hear it.

She sprang down the carpeted corridor and reached the door. In another instant she had opened it and was looking into the room.

The next instant she fell back with a poorly-suppressed cry, for Mora was moving toward the threshold and as Hetty hugged the opposite wall again she saw the millionaire's child come out.

In one hand which was quite bloodless Hetty saw that she carried a knife.

The girl's fingers were wound closely about the handle which was dark, and the blade lay along her whitened sleeve like the dirk of an assassin.

Back toward her own room went Mora, but all at once she turned toward Harold's.

She stopped and looked back, but did not see the breathless Hetty creeping at her heels, though for a moment the telephone girl thought she had been discovered and was in danger of the blade.

Mora opened the door of Harold's room and entered.

Hetty slipped after her. She came to the door and pushed it ajar, and the next moment she was watching Mora Esty as she opened the lower drawer of the bureau and hid the dagger therein!

This act took all that remained of Hetty Hitts's breath.

She seemed to have reached the solution of Harold's silence.

He must have witnessed a similar scene and more.

He must have seen what she had just seen and something more terrible still.

No wonder he refused to tell how the dagger came to be found in his drawer.

Hetty felt like sinking to the floor in a faint, but her nerve kept her up.

She drew back from the door and watched it a moment, but Mora did not emerge.

By and by she crept to the head of the stairs and waited there. She saw the girl come forth at last; she watched her as she turned toward her own chamber, and beyond its portals she vanished.

Hetty was now seized with an impulse to enter Harold's room, but something seemed to hold her back.

She had seen Mora deposit the dagger in the drawer; she guessed that she had placed another there, and with this thought in her mind she went down-stairs.

Surely she had Harold's secret now.

What should she do?

In the hall below she stopped until she caught her breath. The parlor was well-lighted. Should she enter and wait for Mora? No, better go home with the secret dread and terrible in her keeping.

She resolved to do so.

Pressed down by what she had witnessed, Hetty Hitts went back to the streets again. She glided hither and thither under the lamps of Gotham and at last found herself in her own little room.

Harold was innocent; but Mora?

She had not seen the pantomime which must have been enacted by the somnambulist in the death-room, but she could guess what it was like. She had seen enough: she had witnessed more than she cared to witness, and again she wished she had never been born.

And Orson Owlet? Would he ferret out the truth? Would this man find the link she was confident she had secured, and would he play out the hand he was fast gathering?

But she knew that Owlet believed that Harold was innocent, and that Mora—Mora, the sleep-walker—knew no crime.

CHAPTER XX.

IN THE QUAKER CITY.

HARVEY HAWK set out for Philadelphia with a good deal of unwillingness.

He had been driven to the chase by Carmel who, seeking revenge against the man called Captain Coyningham, had sent him (Hawk) after the fleeing couple.

The handsome man who had played his part with Popsy Vane in robbing the old man of the philter to return and be left bound in a chair from which he had effected a miraculous escape in time to save his own life, was both cool and as cunning as cool.

Harvey Hawk who knew the ways of the man he had been sent not only to watch but to slay left the city at a late hour on his way to Philadelphia.

He had nothing to guide him but the letter which Carmel had found in Coyningham's room and this nestled in his pocket.

It was not a very sure clue, but in Carmel's eyes it was enough.

Harvey would have preferred remaining in New York after his adventure with Hetty in the restaurant and while the time sped on he fell back in his seat and took his ease.

He would come back and succeed yet; he cared but little for Carmel's smiles; he preferred the dark eyes of Hetty Hitts, and it pleased him to know that the girl's lover even then repined in a felon's cell and only waited to be taken to the noose.

"Why not give them time to clear out entirely?" thought Harvey Hawk. "They won't stay long in the Quaker City, and if they are stopping on Race street it is only for a while. Why not watch the house till they go away and then go back with a concocted story for the woman?"

The more he thought of this plan the more he liked it, and by the time he reached the outskirts of Philadelphia he had settled upon it.

Harvey Hawk did not go very direct to

the right spot, but was taken to a first-class hotel where he paraded himself a few minutes and then vanished.

Philadelphia did not seem to be a strange place to him. He appeared to know just where Race street ran, for after dinner, pretty well disguised, he sauntered in that direction and caught the number of the house.

It was a plain two story brick with closed shutters and with nothing about it to indicate that it was more famous than its neighbors.

"So they're supposed to be in there, eh?" muttered the spy. "Well, I'm not caring very much. The captain grew tired of Carmel, I suppose, and the good looks of Norma struck him favorably."

He drew off a little distance and began an espionage of the house which lasted till late in the day before he saw anything.

Then the door opened and a man came out.

"It's the Captain, yet it's not him," murmured Hawk. "He has lost much of his fine beard and that means concealment or flight. Carmel may be right. This man may intend to betray the Circle. That will never do."

Hawk became more and more interested in his man-hunt and he followed Coyningham past the post-office and up one street and down another till he found him seated under the trees in Independence Park.

Cruel Coyningham, as Natalie, or Sophy, had called him, was alone, and he enjoyed a cigar while Harvey watched him.

A pleasant breeze stirred the leaves overhead and birds flitted hither and thither, but were not noticed by the man on the bench.

By and by Coyningham was approached by a boy who placed something in his hand.

The disguised man opened the letter and bent forward to read it.

Having done this he crumpled it in his hand and threw a cautious look around.

"It startled him," said Hawk. "Captain Boyd has received a letter from an unexpected source. What will he do now?"

Coyningham rose a moment later and walked off followed by the spy from New York. He left the Park, sauntered down the street in front of the Hall and turned to the left.

"He's going back to Norma," thought Hawk. "What trouble this fellow's giving me."

But Cruel Coyningham did not go back to Race street.

He stopped in front of a house some distance from the thoroughfare and rung a bell.

Hawk could not follow him beyond that door. He had to draw off chagrined and wait.

He waited nearly an hour, or until the lamps were being lighted, and then the door was flung open and a little boy ran out.

"Where is the police?" cried the lad. "There's a dead man in the house on the second floor to the right."

Harvey Hawk sprung out from behind the sheltering tree and made for the door to the boy's astonishment and the next moment he was inside.

He went up the stairs two steps at a bound and burst into the right room at a venture.

The sight that met his gaze was appalling.

Captain Coyningham sat in a chair near the table. His arms hung over the sides and one of the hands was bloody.

There was blood on his shirt front, blood on the chair, the table and the floor.

Not only this, but in the left hand was clutched a knife with a long blade and a keen edge.

Harvey Hawk with his heart in his throat stood in the middle of the chamber. He knew that the dead man before him was Cruel Coyningham.

In a few minutes some one would come in. The boy might come back accompanied by a policeman and then he would not have a chance to search the body.

He sprung forward and began to ransack the captain's pockets. He went through them with a swiftness almost amazing, and in one he found a lot of papers which he appropriated at a venture and in another a few bits of jewelry.

He left the latter as it was not wanted by

him, but the papers he hid on his own person.

He did not finish this work a moment too soon. Steps came up the stairs and an officer followed by the boy rushed into the room.

"There he is!" cried the latter. "Just as I found him—"

"And just as he was when I came in," finished Harvey bowing to the policeman. "It seems to be a case for the coroner."

Ten minutes later Harvey Hawk sat in a little apartment in his hotel with the papers found on Captain Coyningham's person spread out before him.

There was a letter which was evidently the one handed the dead man in the Park, and he turned to it first.

It ran as follows:

"You ought to know that you cannot escape, no matter where you go. You are marked as surely as if the brand of Cain was on your brow. All of the band will fall by the hand of vengeance and you the first of the nice lot. Why don't you try to go back to England though you don't belong there. Better Dartmoor than death in this country, don't you think? That last game sealed the doom of all. You and Carmel, Harvey Hawk, Jack Noddles, so called, and the other one, if she still lives, all are doomed to perish one by one. Don't think that you can escape my hand. I knew you the moment you set foot in Philadelphia. You can go to No — Arch and find a room for the present. They will ask no questions. I will come soon and will talk to you. Don't think you can escape for none of you can."

"THE HAND."

Harvey Hawk read this letter twice before he laid it down.

This was what had driven Cruel Coyningham to suicide. This was the death-blow delivered as certainly as a knife could have done in the hands of an enemy.

He turned to the other papers and went through them also.

Perhaps if he had waited in Arch street he might have seen the writer of that letter.

But it was too late now.

Norma had been left alone by the death of Cruel Coyningham.

Should he hunt the girl up and tell her? He thought of that, but hesitated. Why should he do so?

Keeping the papers, he went down upon the street.

Everywhere the lamps had been lighted and he stood underneath one, smoking quietly.

"Could I see you a moment?" said a voice at his elbow.

Harvey did not turn. Perhaps the question had not been addressed to him; he would wait and see.

"Just a moment, beg your pardon," said the same voice, and this time his arm was touched.

The cool-headed sport turned and looked into a face he did not recognize.

"Is this your hotel?" said the stranger.

"Which room do you occupy?"

"Come with me," said Harvey Hawk. "I am on the third floor. Yes, you can see me, but let us go to my room."

They went up together in the elevator, standing side by side, and Harvey opened his door. He ushered the stranger into the apartment and shut the door, carefully locking it magically as he did so.

The next moment he stepped forward and faced the man with a pair of keen eyes.

"Your man killed himself an hour ago," said he.

"You know that, then? You have seen him?"

"I do not say that. I only say that he is dead."

"Then, if you please, I will take the documents he had on his person."

As terrible as the explosion of a bomb in his presence was this cool demand.

Harvey Hawk seemed to fall back, all the time looking into the face before him. This man would take those important papers. He guessed not.

For a moment he did not speak, but he saw that the man before him was not to be frightened off in that manner.

"I took no papers from the dead man,"

said Hawk. "Tell me why I should plunder the dead."

"Because dead men thus armed tell tales," was the reply. "This man could talk, though dead, and you know it by the papers."

Harvey seemed to measure the distance between them. It was a small space, but it might be dangerous to attempt to cover it. He would have to be as quick as a cat.

Suddenly the stranger flashed in Harvey Hawk's face something from which he felt back with a start.

It was a cocked six-shooter, and behind it gleamed the cool eyes of a man of undoubted nerve.

He had been brought to bay.

The menace of the revolver, without the threat of the eyes behind it, was enough. It was quite enough to tell the good-looking fellow—the Satan of Old Popsy's experience—that he must not trifle with the hand at the trigger.

"The papers, if you please," said the stranger. "I am not here to play with you, Mr. Hawk. You know why I am here, though I have not mentioned my name."

Harvey bit his lip underneath the raven mustache. He bit it till the blood came, and all at once he threw into the man's lap the same documents he had taken from the dead.

But once the victor glanced down at the papers and seemed to count them mentally and in a second.

"That's wise," said he, still looking into Harvey's face. "You are a gentleman of discretion. Now you can go."

What, free? He could not believe it. Then he was not to be taken and locked up? That was something, and it sent his blood fast through his veins once more.

He looked toward the door but did not rise.

After all he might recover those documents. It was worth trying.

He saw the revolver lowered as the hand of the man picked up the papers.

Harvey Hawk felt that his time had come.

He went at the robber like an arrow thrown from a catapult.

He covered the space between them and caught him by his lengthy stretch of throat. They went at it across the carpet, the hands of Harvey Hawk sinking into his antagonist's windpipe, as it seemed, and the stranger trying to tear them loose.

At last Harvey fell against the table and it turned with him. In another second he lost his man, and when he looked again he discovered that he was the sole occupant of the room.

CHAPTER XXI.

OWLET FINDS THE RUNAWAY.

"THAT man was Orson Owlet!" cried Harvey Hawk when he caught his breath.

Not a sign of his antagonist could he see. The overturned table and a broken chair were evidences of the battle for the mastery in the room, but not a drop of blood.

Perhaps the handsome man wondered why he had no manacles at his wrists, but none he had.

He had escaped, but he had been robbed.

After awhile he ventured down-stairs and once more made his way to the street.

"He knew that Coyningham is dead; therefore he must know where Norma is," thought Harvey. "What would Carmel say to all this?"

He smiled when he thought of the woman left in New York, and as he walked off, gnawing an unlit cigar, his thoughts went back to the tussle in the room.

"He has the same powers now as when he was Dunbar Vivier. He has lots of nerve and plenty of coolness. With all the coolness imaginable he looked into my face and demanded those papers. He knew I had them, that detective did. He knew they nestled in my pocket and he knows their value."

Meanwhile the man who had confronted the city Adonis at the hotel had gone away.

If Harvey could have followed him he would have traced him to Race street and to a door which bore the family name of Boutelle.

He rung gently and then waited with a face calm and seamed with patience.

The door was opened in a few seconds and an elderly woman made her appearance.

"I have a message for Norma," said he. "Her friend is injured and would like to—"

"You are a minute too late," was the interruption. "Norma has gone away."

"But she was here?"

"Oh, yes. She bade me good-by just now and has gone."

"Without knowing that her companion is seriously injured?"

"I cannot say. Am sorry, indeed."

"You are Mrs. Boutelle?"

"I am Mary Boutelle."

The man came into the hall and she shut the door.

"You raised the girl, I believe?"

"What is that to you?" was the answer, and the woman drew herself up haughtily and looked into the face in the light.

"I was asking the question, that is all."

"You are an officer. You are a detective. I will have nothing to do with you."

All hopes of information seemed to end there and then.

The face of Mrs. Boutelle grew ashen and she leaned against the wall with her arms folded in a very determined manner.

"I am whatever you choose to call me—no matter what that may be," he replied.

"The girl who came hither from New York is in a bad box and unless she comes forward very soon and surrenders herself she must take the consequences."

The next instant a cry was heard and Mrs. Boutelle, with flashing eyes, looked upstairs.

She had been caught in a lie, for the cry had come from one of the upper rooms, and her face showed her indignation as she looked up the steps.

"Norma is in the house," said the man in the hall. "Don't you think it would be a good idea to produce her?"

"You shall have her, sir, since she has betrayed herself. Norma, come down here."

The command was almost instantly obeyed and the following moment a flutter of a dress was heard and Norma, the runaway maid, showed herself on the stairs.

The man—it was Orson Owlet—watched her with much curiosity while she came down and on the lowest step she stopped and looked at him quizzically.

"Well, Norma, I am glad to see you," he said.

There was nothing harsh about his voice; on the contrary it was soft and kind and the fears of the girl seemed to vanish immediately.

As for Mrs. Boutelle, with a countenance severe and cold, she looked at Norma a moment and then left the scene.

She had turned the girl over to the man who wanted her. Her anger at that time could go no further.

Owlet advanced to where Norma stood and leaned toward her.

"Where is he?" asked the maid.

Evidently she did not know what had happened, for her question was natural and there was no intent to deceive any one.

"Into this room a moment," said Owlet, opening a door on the right and revealing a room quite dark.

"No!" put in Norma, "since Mrs. Boutelle seems to have quite abandoned me I will hold no conference in her house."

"Where at, then?"

"You have been looking for me. You did not deny awhile ago that you are a detective. I have lived in your shadow ever since that terrible night. I am in your hands now."

Orson Owlet looked at the girl and saw how deathly white she was.

"You have not told me what has happened him," she said.

"He is dead."

"Dead!"

She fell back a step and clasped her hands. Old Owlet let her have her fright out without disturbing her, and it was some seconds before she recovered.

"Where is he anyhow?"

"At the Morgue by this time."

"Ah, it was accidental, then?"

He leaned toward her as he lowered his voice:

"It was suicide, Norma."

"Then I am partially avenged," cried the girl. "This is the beginning of the vengeance of Heaven. I have been in their hands so long that I could not call my soul my own. Call in Mrs. Boutelle. I want to see that woman before I depart."

As Owlet did not move, Norma bounded across the hall and opened a door so quickly that the woman listening at the keyhole was thrown half way across the room beyond.

"You know what has befallen him!" cried Norma, as she straightened in the middle of the chamber and covered the woman with quivering finger. "He the wretch has taken his own life. This man tells me so and he is now at the Morgue. You were hurrying me thither as fast as possible; but I will live to see all of you doomed. You know who I am, but you keep from me the secret of my birth, the most sacred secret one can have. You need not tell me now. Don't open your mouth and speak a lie. Let me die with that secret unknown for I am what you have made me—a thing more despicable than the worm we kill beneath our heel!"

The mien of Norma was something terrible. She seemed to move toward the breathless woman as she spoke, but in fact she stood still, her body swaying a little in the wind of passion.

"Take her away!" cried Mrs. Boutelle to the detective. "I don't want her in my house another minute."

"Yes, take me off," said Norma. "Take me where you will, only let me quit this place. He is dead? Thank Heaven! It is the beginning of vengeance long delayed. Are we going back to the city?"

There was no reply to this and Norma walked to the front door and opened it.

Old Owlet escorted her through the streets, now and then looking into her face, but speaking not. He seemed content to leave the maid to her own thoughts, confident, perhaps, that she would talk when the time came.

In a short time he and Norma reached the hotel and the girl was shown to the ladies' parlor.

She was calm now.

Old Owlet waited awhile and at last he went over to where she sat and said:

"You recall vividly, no doubt, Norma, the events of the night of the 25th?"

She sat on a settee with her face partly turned from him, and at sound of his voice she looked into his eyes.

There was no start, no sign of fear, and Norma replied not to the question.

Orson Owlet was the one who looked astonished. He saw that a change had come over the maid—that in the twinkling of an eye as it were she had been changed from a sane person into one bereft of reason.

Norma unwound her hands and put them out like a child looking playfully first at one then at the other, but she spoke not.

"Come, you know what happened the night Mr. Esty died don't you, Norma?"

She laughed a low, sorrowful laugh, musical in its soft cadence, but heartrending to hear.

"I am with grandpa and the sea," she said, the laugh giving way to a smile that lingered. "I hear the waves as they come into the cove and the boat is there."

It was a glimpse of an old life—a broken chapter from her own childhood and the detective desisted.

Norma arose and began to walk the floor. Suddenly she spied the piano and seated herself at it. Owlet waited as her fingers went lightly over the keys, and all at once she began to play a tune which was a favorite twenty years before.

Norma was back amid the scenes of her girlhood, back to the home which had existed beside the sea, and the present had been blotted out by the events of the past few hours.

Old Owlet listened to the music which continued till others hearing it came to listen, when he put an end to it by leading the maid from the instrument, and together they went down-stairs.

Norma did not resist now. A carriage was called and they were driven to Bond street Depot.

Every now and then Norma talked about the home by the sea and referred to the waves

beating against the coast and playing in a little cove where her playhouse was.

And what did the prince of detectives think? What was he saying to himself as the train whirled them over the iron track to New York?

"This girl holds the secret. This creature knows who dealt the fatal blow; she knows who took the millionaire's life, and we may have to wait till reason comes back, if it ever comes."

Thus spoke Orson Owlet to himself while he stole glances at Norma, the maid.

Landed in Gotham, he helped the girl from the boat and to a carriage. They were driven up-town and the vehicle landed them in front of Mora Esty's home.

Norma took no notice of the place till she found herself in the parlor and face to face with the astonished Mora.

She looked at the costly hangings as if she at least knew where she was, then gazed at Mora while the millionaire's child watched her with bated breath.

All at once Norma started toward the hall. She mounted the broad stairs, followed closely by Owlet and Mora.

They felt that something was about to happen. They looked at one another as if they believed that the maid was going to unravel a part of the crimson skein of crime.

At the head of the steps Norma stopped, seemed to reflect a moment and then went toward Harold's room.

They followed on.

The door of the room was unlocked, and the maid entered, but halted in the middle of the place and passed a hand slowly across her forehead.

"I hear the birds and the sea," she muttered with the old expressionless smile. "I hear the waters in the cove and Phil will launch the boat ere long."

"What is she saying?" whispered Mora with a strange look.

The moment following Norma sprung to the prisoner's bureau, jerked open the bottom drawer and cried in shrill tones:

"What have you done with the knife you hid here, Mora Esty?"

The next instant she laughed; she was mad again.

CHAPTER XXII.

A GLIMPSE AT A LIFE.

THE effect of Norma's mad exclamation upon Mora was startling.

The millionaire's child turned white and seemed to recoil while she stared at her maid who standing at the bureau was covering her with a trembling finger while she laughed.

Orson Owlet looked at Mora and then said in soothing tones:

"The girl is mad."

"I hope to heaven she is," was the reply.

"The knife I hid in the drawer? Surely she must be mad."

Norma seemed to forget her startling charge for all at once she began to talk about the sea and the little cove, and at last Old Owlet took her by the arm and led her from the room.

Norma submitted without cavil and she was led down stairs while Mora, still white, followed her.

"It was something fearful," said the dead man's daughter to the detective. "It went through me like a knife. Oh, what a terrible charge it was!"

"She seems to be harmless," answered Owlet. "We might keep her here in hopes of developments in a few days—"

"No, not here in this house!" cried Mora. "I could not bear to be cooped up with her; no, no, Captain Owlet. There are places for people like her, and I could not live with her under this roof for her malady might take a dangerous turn and I would be alone to combat her."

There was logic in what Mora said and the detective resolved to take Norma away.

He had a friend in another part of the city, a real Amazon whom he could trust to deal with her sane or insane, and telling the maid that he would convey her to a quiet place where she would find friends, he bade her give Mora good-by which she effusively did and the two departed.

Old Owlet took Norma nearly across the

city and, within view of the river, stopped at a house into which he conducted her and turned her over to a woman who had once been a matron of a private asylum, for the insane.

"Watch her like a hawk," said the ferret to Mrs. Hopes. "Her malady thus far is simple in its workings; she imagines herself a child and back once more among the scenes of her girlhood. But should she go through any pantomime don't lose sight of a bit of it."

The woman promised, and after admonishing Norma to remain where she was he went back to another part of the trail.

Cruel Coyningham was dead—dead by his own hand, and his body even then lay on one of the slabs of the Quaker City Morgue.

Had Carmel heard of it? Had the handsome man whom he had confronted in the Philadelphia hotel sent her word of the suicide and had Jack Noddles, the so-called detective, been informed of the captain's sudden taking off?

Owlet went back that day to Mrs. Larrigan's.

He entered his little room—the one formerly occupied by Jack Noddles, as Costerman—and sat down.

A little rest after his trip and adventures to and in Philadelphia would not come amiss, and the house was quiet enough for a good sleep.

Mrs. Larrigan had not seen him come in, and he was hoping that she would not disturb him, when this dream was rudely broken.

There came a sharp rapping on the door, and Owlet opened it to admit Mrs. Larrigan.

She shut the portal carefully behind her as she glided across the carpet and took a chair near the detective.

"You've come in a little too late," said she.

"Why so?"

"You've had a caller, or at least I think so."

Old Owlet was interested from the first.

"What was he like?" he asked.

"Laws, it wasn't a man."

"Ah, a lady caller, then?"

"Yes, a woman. She came in about an hour ago and asked if you were in."

"Called me by name, eh?"

"Asked for Cyrus Delafield, you see. Had your name down pat as if she was an old acquaintance. She wasn't bad-looking, neither, but somehow or other she didn't impress me as being a great beauty."

"Was she much disappointed at not finding me in?"

"She seemed to be, said she would call again, and asked at what hours you were at home."

"Of course you notified her?"

Owlet smiled.

"How could I give her any definite information when you come and go at odd hours, and never tell me when to look for you? I told her that you might be in soon, or you might not show up for days. I never look after my roomers' business, you see; but I would have obliged the lady if I could."

Orson Owlet seemed to suspect who had called upon him, and if asked to name her he would have called her Carmel.

He was left to reflect upon the strange visit while Mrs. Larrigan retired, and in a few moments he was smoking quietly while he went through the papers he had secured from Harvey Hawk after the desperate struggle at the hotel.

There were three papers, tied together with a brown twine, and he separated them carefully.

They were covered with uniform writing, and one was much briefer than its fellows.

Owlet knew that what he held in his hands had been taken from Coyningham's body by the Adonis, and therefore they were likely to prove interesting.

The briefest one he read first.

It referred to some property which belonged to Coyningham in the South, and at the bottom of the sheet was a small diagram showing the location of a mica mine.

The second paper was of an entirely different nature and at one name thereon the detective stopped and stared.

It was the name of Payson Esty, the murdered millionaire.

This document showed that Coyningham and Esty were joint owners of a mica mine

in North Carolina, and that the writer of the document, presumably Coyningham himself, accused the millionaire of cheating him out of the profits of the business.

"I charge this man, Payson Esty," read the paper, "with sailing under false colors—of hoodwinking the people of New York, and at being at one time a criminal, as I could prove in a court of justice."

"I say, without fear of contradiction, that I can prove him to be the common enemy of mankind and a man who, if he had his just deserts, would be spurned by the society in which he moves and in which he has brought up his children. I can prove that he belonged at one time to a band which was hunted out of one of the chief cities of the world and forced to scatter, and all on account of this man's treachery."

The second document ended abruptly and Old Owlet turned to the third and last one.

It was closely folded and sealed with a drop of green wax.

Owlet broke the seal and opened it.

Three small sheets fell upon the table and he gathered them up with a good deal of eagerness.

"The life of Payson Esty and the death of Juggins Corde."

This was the top line that stood out in all its strangeness before the old ferret.

Juggins Corde was a new name to Orson Owlet; he had not run across it before in the game of mystery and crime.

"Juggins Corde," he read, "died in the year of our Lord 1881 at No. 112 Cheapside, London, the night after the last meeting of the Circle in the old red house. I was not present at his death, but I arrived a few moments after and took from beneath the bolster of his couch the paper which in his last agonies he wrote and thrust underneath it for the future finder."

"Juggins Corde feared that the end was near and I felt that the ambition of Payson Esty, then Adam Caine, would never be satisfied till the old man was out of the way. We took this man, destined ever after to be a thorn in our sides, into the Red Circle; we thought we saw that the time was coming when he would get more than his share of this world's goods, and that we could then feather our nests if we should be unsuccessful."

"It turned out partially so. He left England and came back to his own land. He made money hand over fist, and when I came across him he had just opened a mica mine in North Carolina. What money this man our old companion had! He had two children, a boy and a girl, the former somewhat irritable and the latter pretty and courageous. I saw her courage tried one night when I was calling on her father at home, for she put out of the hallway unassisted a man who forced his way into the house armed with a knife and evidently a maniac."

"Payson Esty would have but little to do with us. He hung on to his wealth as if he could take it all with him and I got but little. I told him that we had made him in London—how we had given him his start in life; but he would not open his purse. Then I referred to the few shares he had a year previously given me in the mica mine, and asked him if he thought that was enough to pay for the keeping of the secret of his past."

"At this he flared up and asked me if I thought any one in New York would believe us were we to say that he had been Adam Caine—a man liable to arrest on sight by the Scotland Yard men. His overbearing manner went through me like a knife and when I went back to the others a vote was taken. It had to come to this and the man we had befriended and made somebody so far as wealth was concerned, had to be taught a lesson."

"The world knows now that Payson Esty is dead. It knows that he no longer counts his wealth in the darkened rooms of his mansion, and that he has loosened his grip forever on the good things of this life. But it does not know that he was not the honest man the city thought him. New York and her ferrets will never know perhaps—not for a time at least—that he went the way of all flesh because he could not be a man among men—because he refused to pay his friends back for what they had done for

him. The vengeance of the Red Circle is terrible. The hand of the Banded Brotherhood never fails, and its ways are many and fatal."

"This will not be read by any one while the writer lives. It will not see the light of day while the hand that pens it has a grip which treachery cannot shake off. When the writer has shuffled off—when he has passed from the stage of action, this may be found by a keen hand and a searching eye, and then the world will know that Payson Esty's avarice killed him, that it settled his accounts with the Red Circle. So perish all who break the Code, no matter where they hide nor what be their position in life. As for the writer let him speak though dead, and he speaks here, though he does not betray the hand that avenged the broken Code."

No signature followed the ending of the paper and Orson Owlet looked up with a smile on his leathery face.

He laid the three documents side by side on the table and saw that the same hand had penned them all.

He was about to take them up again one by one when footsteps distinctly approached his door, and thinking that perhaps Mrs. Larrigan was coming back, he looked toward the portal and waited.

The door was not locked, and it was opened slowly and with extreme caution.

This was not his landlady's way and Owlet waited for the one outside to enter.

A woman slipped into the room and stopped just beyond the threshold.

Owlet saw that her face was veiled and that she was not the loquacious Mrs. Larrigan.

The next moment with a sudden spring the detective's caller came toward the table where he sat, and there she halted, while she leaned forward, showing a pair of eyes that flashed beyond the thin veil.

The mysterious woman had come back. She had returned according to promise and she was not Carmel.

Suddenly a hand came out from among the folds of the dark garment worn by the Unknown and a revolver was thrust across the table. It was poked unceremoniously into the ferret's face and he saw the white hand that clutched it with an energy born of desperation.

"I have found you at last!" said a voice. "You were not here when I called awhile ago. You are the dangerous man! You are the bloodhound on the trail and I am here to kill!"

It was evident even before this announcement was made that she had come to slay.

The menacing pistol spoke hard upon the last sentence.

The report filled the room and Orson Owlet, falling back, overturned the chair and went to the floor with a startling sound.

In another instant the murderess snatched up the papers on the table, crumpling all in her eager grasp and turned to the door.

Mrs. Larrigan, entering at that moment white-faced and breathless, had an experience she would never forget, for all at once she was seized by the flying woman and flung aside and half way down the corridor.

The next moment the female cyclone was gone.

Down the steps and out into the street with the speed of a gazelle she went, looking not back but straight ahead, with her fingers still at the butt of the deadly weapon and her eyes aflame beneath the veil.

By and by Mrs. Larrigan came into Old Owlet's room.

She found the chair broken on the floor, and near it with a little rivulet of blood on his cheek, stood the detective with a grim smile of greeting on his face.

"That was the same creature!" cried Mrs. Larrigan. "Laws what a power she has!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

SOPHY HUNTS A SECRET.

"I TOLD you I'd do it!"

Jack Noddles started from the sofa upon which he had thrown himself for a little rest and stared at the woman who had burst into the room.

"Here are the prizes of the play. I haven't looked at them; I found them on his table

and snatched them up in a bunch at one fell grab."

A lot of papers fell at Jack's feet all crumpled, just as they had been picked up, and he looked from them to the woman in the middle of the room.

"In heaven's name, what have you done?" he asked.

"What you hadn't the nerve to do!" was the sharp response. "I found him alone and I settled him."

"Orson Owlet?"

"The bloodhound of two worlds—the leathery-faced man who gave you a number in Dartmoor and who is hated by me with all my soul! I found him with those papers spread out before him, and as he fell back from the smoke of my revolver I caught them up and vanished."

"You shot him, then?"

"Of course! I found him as Cyrus Delafield and in the very room which you occupied for a while. There's no fear of him now."

Sophy talked rapidly and with excitement.

"No one saw you did they? I don't see how you did it and then got away."

"It was luck perhaps. Oh, I had to run against the woman who keeps the house, but I tossed her to one side and then coolly left the place."

"You are the boldest woman I ever saw," and a faint smile came to Jack's face. "It was a little too bold. You might have waited, girl."

"Until he had played out this game according to his notion? Never! I am not the woman who waits."

Jack picked up the papers and at first glance started and threw his sister a quick look.

"Did you get them all?" he queried.

"All there was in sight. I had to snatch quick, but I covered the ground. There was nothing else to take; I got everything."

He read on a moment and then looked up once more.

Sophy, or Natalie, had gone over to the window and was looking down into the street.

"According to these papers," said Jack, "Coyningham must be dead somewhere."

"Dead, did you say?" cried the girl, coming toward him. "What makes you think so?"

"They were not to see the light until after his death and he carried them in his bosom."

"Let me see!" and Sophy reached out for the documents which were placed in her hands.

"It seems true; it must be so," she exclaimed. "Do you think he can be dead? Did the bloodhound know?"

"If he did not know how did these papers fall into his hands?"

"How indeed?"

Jack's sister seemed to take a long breath. For a moment she watched him in silence and then she came up to the sofa and laid a hand on his arm.

"You must pardon me, Jack," said she. "I loved that man."

"Cruel Coyningham?"

"Yes."

"Then, thank Heaven that he is dead."

Sophy's face turned a ghastly white.

"Let the rascal—for rascal he was—go," said Jack. "We have other things to look to now. You have killed Orson Owlet. It will be known all over the city in a short time, and the police will be looking for the woman in the black veil."

"Let them look!" cried the girl defiantly. "Let them hunt for me with all their skill. I know this is not old London with its hiding-places, its Dusthole and its Cheapside. This is New York, and here, years ago we passed the little childhood we had to drift across the pond—"

"Hark?" and Jack Noddles sprang up with the mien of a hunted beast.

While Sophy, still cool, drew her revolver and faced the door.

Had they found her so soon?

No one came in, and the fear which had filled Jack Noddles's eyes a moment vanished and he smiled when he looked at his sister again.

"A false alarm," smiled the girl. "They don't know who did it, or they would have been here ere this."

The alarm passed, brother and sister grew very calm once more and Jack returned to the papers.

While he read Sophy went back to the window and watched, looking down into the street and marking all who passed the house.

"Where is Carmel?" suddenly asked the girl looking over her shoulder.

"In the house where I showed you."

"Does she live alone?"

"Yes."

"And Harvey?"

"He has rooms of his own in another part of the city."

"But Boyd lived with Carmel, did he not?"

"No; he came to the house often, that was all. Sophy, you are rid of a curse."

There was no reply to this, and Sophy left the room to re-enter it a few minutes later so changed that Jack had to look twice to make sure that she was his sister.

"They can't penetrate this disguise," said the girl in tones of triumph.

"But you are not going to venture out now?"

"Why not? The ferrets haven't got second wind yet. I must go out."

"Whither?"

"To Carmel. You must remember that I haven't seen her yet."

"Let Carmel alone," advised Jack. "You and Carmel never got along very well, you know."

A proud smile curled the girl's lip and she shook her head.

"I will see Carmel and see her now if the way to her house is lined with the shadows of New York! I must see Carmel."

Jack, unable to hold her back, waved his hand toward the door.

"Go, then, and if the whirlwind becomes your harvest, girl, don't blame me."

"I will blame no one but Sophy," was the reply and with another look at her brother Jack Noddles's sister went away.

"Willful and strong-headed. So she shot him? I might have known that she would do something rash, but I hardly looked for anything of this kind. Out of the way and by Sophy's hand! What will Carmel say, and how will Harvey take the news? He ought to brea the freer at any rate. I hope there was no half-way work about it now that it is done. If Sophy wasn't recognized by Mrs. Larrigan, whom she had to throw to one side to get out of the house, this affair may become as famous as the other one. The old score is settled at last, Dunbar Vivier. You gave me a number in Dartmoor and Sophy gives you—death!"

Meantime Sophy was well on her way to the home of Carmel.

She flitted down-town with the greatest coolness, and now and then stopped in a crowd to hear if her deed had got abroad and if any one was talking about it.

She mounted the steps in front of Carmel's house and rung the bell.

Sophy was older than Carmel, but not so handsome. There was about Jack's sister a determined expression which could not be found in Carmel's face, and Sophy smiled once or twice to herself while she waited for her ring to be answered.

The door opening revealed Carmel herself in the hallway and the next moment Sophy with a sudden impulse had pushed past her.

Carmel of the Red Circle fell back and stared at the girl who at that moment raised her veil and smiled.

"When did you come?" cried Carmel.

"Ha, you recognize me. Have I changed very much?"

"Not a great deal. You look pale, though, when you used to have red cheeks."

"So I had, but you see, Carmel, I have more years to tell the story of a woman's life."

Carmel led Sophy into a parlor, but did not flood it with light, as if she preferred having it dark and gloomy.

"What do you know?" asked the Queen of the Circle, looking into Sophy's face as she saw it in the shadows of the room. "You used to have all of it, you recollect."

"That is what you used to tell me. You have heard that he is dead?"

Carmel seemed to cross the room, but she stopped close to the girl and took in a long breath.

"Why should it come to you first, this news?" she cried.

"You don't know it then? Jack says it must be so. Coyningham is dead."

There was no start on Carmel's part, but instead an eager gleam lit up her eye.

"She loved this man," thought Sophy. "She fairly worshiped him; but now she takes his death with all the coolness of a savage. What has happened?"

"Where did he die?" inquired Carmel, after a moment's silence.

"I cannot tell you."

"But Jack, you say, has the documents—the ones he carried next his heart. How did they fall into Jack's hands?"

"In a manner some what startling. They fell first into the clutches of the detective."

Carmel uttered a cry she could not suppress.

"Into the hands of that man?"

"Yes."

"But how did Jack get them after that?"

"By force," answered Sophy, as her eyes lit up with the recollection of the near past.

"Did he rob the detective?"

"No, I did!"

"You? You rob Orson Owlet, the prince of ferrets? I don't believe that at all."

"It may seem impossible to you, but it is true. I got the documents which were not to see the light until after Coyningham's death. They passed through Owlet's hands to Jack's; but I was the bearer of them. I found the man you were afraid to hunt."

Carmel gazed astonished at the woman who spoke thus with the utmost coolness and made no reply.

"You do not start when I tell you that Coyningham is dead. You loved him; you took him from me. You carried him off to this city, and that when I would have given a world for his smile."

"I never loved him. I never thought enough of Boyd Coyningham to play for his love. You have deceived yourself, woman."

Sophy gazed at Carmel a full minute and then passed her hand before her eyes as she tottered to a chair into which she sunk.

"It is too late now!" she sighed. "The past can never be replaced and he is dead. I have stained my hands with blood to save you, Carmel. I have killed to save all of you from the snares of the merciless tracker."

Carmel looked on un pitying and in dead silence.

"Tell me," suddenly cried Sophy, springing up and coming toward the Queen of the Circle, "tell me who killed Payson Esty. You didn't do it—I know that, Carmel, for you hadn't the nerve. I am equally as sure that the boy didn't touch his father with the dagger. He died at the hands of the Red Circle. He breathed his last with one of our number in his presence, counting the breaths as they flitted. You know whose hand did it, Carmel, and, as a member of the Circle, I have a right to know."

She clutched Carmel's arm and looked down into her upturned face. Their faces almost touched.

"Tell me!" cried Sophy. "You need not keep the secret from me. You have no right to do it. Was it Jack? Was it by the hand of Coyningham? Woman, by the hand of Heaven, you shall tell me, or I will throttle you where you are."

Carmel with a cry sprung up and with a sudden effort threw Sophy half-way across the room.

CHAPTER XXIV.

OLD POPSY'S SECRET.

THE dread secret possessed by Hetty the telephone girl was enough to drive her to distraction.

The startling pantomime which she had witnessed in the Esty mansion, the sleep-walking drama of Mora preyed upon her mind all the way home. She could not think of anything else, and when she reached her little room she was well-nigh exhausted.

It was a revelation, the like of which she had never dreamed of—a scene never suspected, and she felt the results of her visit all that night.

Was it possible that Mora, in one of her trances, had taken her father's life? Was

she the slayer of the millionaire for whose murder Harold even then occupied a felon's cell?

Hetty held the secret all alone. No one had seen what she had, and she could place Mora in the net of guilt while Harold would walk from the toils a free man.

Her visit to Orson Owlet's den had failed to find the old ferret, as we have seen, and the little door still bore the sign of—"To Let."

Hetty resolved to keep the secret awhile yet.

She now knew why Harold had refused to answer certain questions.

He must have discovered that Mora was a somnambulist and the secret which Hetty had discovered must belong to him as well.

The poor girl felt that she would break down under the burden of what she knew, and once or twice she almost resolved to impart the terrible information to her mother.

But whenever she came to the point her heart failed her and she kept still.

What had become of Popsy Vane? Hetty who had called at the old astrologer's place had failed to find him, and she began to think that, like Owlet, he had vanished into thin air.

It was the morning after her discovery in Mora's home when she came suddenly upon a familiar figure on the street.

It was slouching along with a shuffling gait, and the stooped shoulders which first attracted the girl's attention told her that she had found Popsy at last.

Hetty walked a little faster and touched the old man's arm as she passed.

There was something in that touch which caused Popsy to look at her and in an instant he recognized the telephone girl.

"Where do you live now, Popsy?" asked Hetty.

"Hush! don't mention it," was the reply. "One has to hide sometimes and I am playing rabbit till the foxes have given up the hunt."

"But you know you need have no fears of me."

"I haven't girl; but here. Come to me whenever you can. Don't come for, say, an hour. By that time I'll be home and there I'll talk to you."

"I'll come."

Old Popsy bent close to the girl's face and whispered the number of a house on Mott street which caused Hetty to smile as she looked up into his face.

"You haven't turned Celestial, have you?" asked the girl.

"You don't know what I'm liable to be yet," was the reply. "I may turn angel before the game's played out. But come, Hetty. I want to see you anyhow."

It was a long hour to the girl and when she turned into Mott street with its Chinese signs and symbols she had an eager heart in her bosom.

It was the last place in her mind to which Popsy Vane would fly, but stranger things than that had happened, and Hetty soon ran up a rickety stairs and rapped at a door at the end of a dark and dingy hall.

Popsy's footsteps were heard inside and he opened the door to take a good look at his visitor's face.

"You've come?" said he. "Are you sure you've not been watched?"

"I took all the caution I could," replied Hetty. "One can't have eyes in the back of one's head, you know."

"Of course not. Come in," and he shut the door the moment Hetty went forward.

It was not Popsy's old place so familiar to hundreds of the black art's patrons in the city. It was more like the den of a hunted beast, and Hetty inhaled the foul odors of the den before she was there a minute.

Popsy Vane looked like a hunted man as he went over to the table and pushed his visitor a cane-bottomed chair, while he took a seat on the edge of the table from whence he could steal sudden glances at the door.

"It's not the old place, eh, Hetty?" he said with a grim smile.

"It is not. You must put up with a good many inconveniences here."

"Oh, that's nothing so long as one's safe. Safety is the thing, you see."

"But were you unsafe in the other place?"

"Bless you, yes. You see they had found me out at last."

"They?" echoed Hetty.

"Did I say that? Well, they have discovered me and that would never do. This is more like a den, but I'm nothing but a beast after all. When did you see Orson last?"

Hetty told him.

"What news had he? Had he picked up the great link yet?"

"I think not."

"No signs of finding it, either?"

"I fear not."

Popsy seemed to reflect a minute for he was silent fully that length of time, watched curiously by the girl who wondered what was passing through his mind.

"I want to show you something, Hetty," he suddenly said. "I know you have never seen it and I don't show it very often."

He plunged one of his dark hands into his bosom and drew up a packet which he proceeded to open.

It was flat and almost as large as his hand, and when he had taken off several wrappings a daguerreotype fell out on the oily table.

Hetty leaned forward to get a look at it, but Popsy's hand swiped it up and he drew it back.

"You won't tell that I have it, will you?" he cried.

"To be sure I won't."

"Orson doesn't know it, you see. Ha, ha, I used to tell Orson nearly everything, but this is one of the secrets he never dragged into the light."

Then he came forward with the picture and the following moment Hetty Hello was looking at the face of a woman.

It had been taken many years when the caprices of fashion were as odd as they were then, and, despite the oddities of her dress, the woman was handsome.

Popsy Vane held the picture close to the girl's face for five minutes.

"Take a good look," he smiled. "You have never seen her face before."

Hetty shook her head.

"It is strange to me, but—"

"What were you going to say?"

"I have seen a face strangely like that."

"You have?" cried Popsy, his little eyes getting a gleam of excitement. "Not in this city, girl?"

"Where else could I have seen it? I have spent all my life in New York."

"But this is not the face you have seen," persisted Popsy. "It cannot be the same one for this picture was taken before you came into the world, girl, and she has been dead many years."

Hetty looked at the face again.

"Who was she, Popsy?" she ventured.

"Ah, who was she?" echoed the old astrologer. "I thought you would want to know, and if I should take a notion not to tell you why you would be disappointed, eh?"

"That is your secret, Popsy. I feel that I have no real right to share it."

The old man took a long breath.

"That is Coral's face," he said at last.

"Coral?" spoke Hetty, looking up into the face above her.

"They wanted to kill me because she died."

The girl drew back with a cry.

"To kill you because she died? Did they—"

"Yes, they said that I did it. Is the door locked, girl?"

"I heard you lock it when I came in."

He looked relieved.

"That is good. Now, I want you to tell me where you saw a face that resembles this one."

"In this city as I have told you. I saw it in the Park not long ago."

"In Central Park?"

"Yes."

"Does she come there?"

"She used to."

"Is she a young girl?"

"She is a young girl."

"Tall?"

"Yes."

"So was Coral."

"She looks so in the picture."

"Was this tall girl pretty?"

"Many would call her so."

"That is a woman's answer," smiled Popsy. "What was the color of her eyes?"

"They were almost but not quite black."

"Just like Coral's!"

Hetty did not speak.

"Tell me where you saw this girl, and to what part of the Park she comes."

Hetty did so, describing where she had seen her on several occasions, but she ended by saying that she believed the person referred to was not to be found there any more.

"Why not?" cried Popsy.

"Because she has vanished. She has left her mistress."

"Oh, gone off?" disappointedly.

"Yes. You see, she seems to be mixed up in a strange and startling crime—"

"The girl you saw in the Park?"

"Yes, that same girl."

"Tell me about it."

"Orson Owlet could have done so before this. He might have told you that the face I have seen in the Park greatly resembles the one in your hand."

"What does Orson know about this girl you tell me of?" exclaimed the old man.

"He is on a trail as you may know."

"He is, indeed."

"With that trail the girl is now connected."

Old Popsy took a long breath and looked away for a moment.

"But you must go on!" said he. "You haven't told me who the girl is. You must know. I know you do. You see her in the Park; she is connected with the trail Orson has taken. Now, Hetty, who is she?"

"She is Mora's maid."

"Norma?"

"Norma."

The picture nearly fell from Popsy's hand and he seemed to tremble.

"Norma the counterpart of that face?" he murmured. "It can't be; but you say so Hetty and it must be so."

"Perhaps I should not have told you."

"No, you did right. How old does Norma seem?"

"She is past twenty."

"And it was nineteen years since they failed to take my life."

Popsy Vane slowly hid the picture from sight and Hetty watched him restore it to its hiding-place. When he had done so he buried his face in his hands and silence reigned in the little den.

It was a long, strange quietude, unbroken save by the breathing of Old Popsy whose face was buried in his gaunt arms.

Hetty Hello pitied him.

"That is all, Hetty," he said looking up at last. "I don't want you any longer."

She pushed back the old chair and arose.

"Good-by, Popsy."

"Farewell, girl. In the Park you say? I won't forget the spot. You have been kind to me. You are one of the few friends Old Popsy has left. No more horoscopes for me. They will have to cast their own or seek another in that business. The stars never lie, though man frequently does. Popsy will find her. He wants to see this girl. She may go off but she will come back to the Park. I will bring her back. I know my art."

A weird smile crossed the wrinkled face and his eyes for a moment lit up with hope, and while the beam still lingered Hetty withdrew, and unlocking the door, passed out and down to the street below.

She looked carefully around her when she struck the sidewalk, and the man who dodged behind a door near by had a familiar look, but he did not give her a second glance.

"Popsy may be in peril," she thought; but she kept on and turned her face homeward.

The daguerreotype and Old Popsy's story had strangely interested Harold Esty's sweet-heart.

CHAPTER XXV.

CLOSING IN.

ORSON OWLET with the air of Mrs. Larri-gan who exclaimed vociferously against the woman who had tried to take a life in her house succeeded in removing the effects of

Sophy's shot, and he was left alone at his request.

He saw that the important papers which he had wrested from Harvey Hawk had in turn been gobbled up by the woman, and that he had not a single page to tell him that Captain Coyningham, the suicide, had left a confession.

It was vexatious to say the least.

He knew that a failure to hear of his death would tell the would-be slayer that her bullet had after all gone wide of the mark, and he wondered at the same time if Harvey had returned to the city.

Harvey Hawk had come back.

So long as the pretty face of Hetty Hitts was to be found in New York so long would the sport be found hovering near the flame of beauty.

He came back as soon as he could get away after the death of Coyningham and his tussle with Owlet in the hotel.

It was seven o'clock the following evening and Hawk, elegantly attired, might have been seen in the vicinity of the girl's home.

He had not made his call on Carmel nor had he hunted up Jack Noddles; he would see them later, but just now he wanted to make sure that Hetty had not vanished.

He watched the house until near eight before he saw any one come out and then the front door opened.

Hetty, closely hooded, stepped upon the pavement and in an instant was followed by Harvey.

The girl made her way across several squares and entered Central Park.

The night was pleasant, but the man on the watch could not see why she should seek the Park at that hour when she might find air and plenty of it in another direction.

Hetty wanted to make a discovery if possible; she wanted to see if Popsy Vane was on the lookout for Norma.

Harvey Hawk saw her enter the Park and take a seat near the gate.

On a settee in the shadow of a tree sat a solitary figure and Hetty knew that Old Popsy had ventured out.

The astrologer was quite alone, and his keen eye scanned every one who came into the Park, and in turn he was as closely watched by the telephone girl.

Of course Norma would not come, but, eager to see what might happen, Hetty took a seat near by and continued to regard the magician.

Harvey Hawk, an unseen spectator of all this, strolled down the path leading past the two settees.

He had taken but little notice of the old man.

All at once Popsy Vane left his bench and with a cry that drove Hetty Hello to her feet he cleared the space between himself and Harvey and was at the sport's side.

They had met for the first time since the scene in Popsy's den when he had the rascal tied in the chair and had left him to a fate from which he had in some miraculous manner escaped.

Hawk turned in time to push the old man off, but Popsy was not to stay there.

"I have you now and there is nothing between you and my hands! Satan must have helped his own in my den, for you vanished when I thought I had you foul. Now you are mine!"

Hetty breathless stood by and saw Popsy force Harvey Hawk toward the line of trees. It was all the work of a mad moment, and the girl's heart stood still in her bosom while the struggle went on.

Some one must certainly come to the villain's rescue. It was impossible that two men could battle there without being interfered with; but no one seemed to come forward.

"Mine! mine!" almost screamed Popsy Vane. "Tracked across the ocean and threatened with the noose, I will have no peace till I strangle all of you. You are here to watch for Norma. You are here to kill the girl as some one else killed her mother."

Popsy had forced Harvey upon the settee and seemed to be choking him there.

"You will rob me of no more philters!" he hissed. "You used it against some innocent victim, and now you're after me. Oh, you can't get away. I have claws like an

eagle and I am more than Popsy Vane, the skylight astrologer."

Suddenly there sprang to the rescue the policeman who had heard the noise of the fracas, and his strong arms tore the combatants apart.

Even then old Popsy glared at Harvey Hawk who entered no complaint, but said something in a low tone to the officer who, after seeing Old Popsy on his settee again, walked off with Hawk.

But there crept after them but at a respectful distance a man who had come up to witness the last scene in the startling meeting.

Harvey Hawk revealed under a lamp did not look as well gotten up as when he entered the Park.

Old Popsy's long fingers had handled him roughly and when he struck the sidewalk he hastened to get beyond the sight of man.

"Somewhere where I can pull myself together," he said with a smile as he surveyed himself. "In a little while I would have been pulled to pieces by that old vulture. I missed the girl by the unfortunate affair, but I'll see her to-morrow. I know where she nests all the same and that's enough."

Harvey Hawk dropped into a tap-room and asked the young man behind the bar for the use of a private room.

He was directed to the young man's apartment on the upper floor and there he proceeded to revise his toilet.

While thus engaged he heard some one come up the stairs and recalling Popsy Vane he sprang across the room toward the door.

"It may be the old wolf after me still," he exclaimed as he caught the latch; but that moment the door swung open in his face and he fell back with a gasp.

"Don't feel alarmed, Mr. Hawk. Popsy Vane won't trouble you any more to-night."

The person who walked toward Harvey Hawk was Orson Owlet, and well the rascal knew it.

They had met before and the meeting was likely to remain long in his mind; he recalled even then the struggle in the Philadelphia hotel, and now that he stood face to face again with this same determined clue-finder he had a right to feel a sudden chill at the heart.

The room was small and possessed a low ceiling. The few pieces of furniture were good ones and everything betokened a little show of luxury on the part of its tenant.

"Take the chair there, Harvey," said Orson.

There was a slight hesitation on Harvey's part, but he did so and Orson Owlet continued:

"You're in my hands now."

"Do you think so?"

"I know it. I am going to take you into custody."

Harvey threw a swift glance toward the street window.

"The game has nearly been fought out. I have picked up the threads of mystery one by one and I have followed them to the end of the skein."

"That's clever," answered Hawk with a powerful display of *sangfroid*. "But you may be mistaken, Orson Owlet. You are a good detective, one of the very best; but you must be careful when you call the turn. You may not have all the threads nor the right ones."

"Never mind that. This is not London, nor is it Seville."

"No."

"It is not North Carolina with its mica mines, nor Australia with its bush."

"You are right. This is America—the land of the free and the home of the brave," smiled Harvey.

"Captain Coyningham killed himself because he received a letter which threatened to make it unpleasant for him. You have not seen Carmel? You have failed to report to her."

Harvey shrugged his shoulders and again looked toward the street.

"There was Juggins Corde, the man who died in London."

"Yes, the one Payson Esty killed."

"So the confession of the captain says. Juggins Corde was a man who almost deserved death. Hunted by the police for his iniquities, hiding from the men of Scot-

land Yard, he fell at last at the hands of a man whose life he made miserable—killed in self-defense."

"That's a new version of that crime."

"Never mind that! New to you, perhaps, but not to those who investigated the affair. You knew that if put upon trial Payson Esty, then Adam Caine, could never have been convicted for that crime. A witness whose testimony could never have been impeached would have stepped forward and cleared the American. But your band had him in its power."

"Why didn't he break from us, then?"

"He dared not try. He dared not expose the past to his children, and when you resolved to finish him in his own house—"

"We?"

"The Red Circle," smiled Orson Owlet. "When you resolved to put him out of the way and then, with the ingenuity of the devil, fasten the crime upon the innocent, you played the greatest hand the Circle ever held."

It was a proud and defiant smile that came to Harvey Hawk's lips and settled there.

"I say it was the coolest hand I ever saw—the most diabolical plot that ever was hatched in this or any other city. It meant the death of two persons and the darkening of other lives. You robbed Popsy Vane of the deadly philter. You had selected that secret emissary of death and with it in your possession you went to work."

"Well?"

The very words of the old detective seemed to embolden the man before him.

"The rest when I play my hand out," said Old Owlet and Harvey Hawk seemed to recoil. "The rest some other time."

Orson Owlet rose and stood over the man.

The smile had left the lips and the eyes seemed to send forth a venomous glitter from the depths of their owner's head.

Was there to be another leap for liberty, another battle for the mastery as in the Quaker City?"

"Come," said Owlet, throwing out a hand. "We will go down together and they won't know what has taken place."

Harvey had been forced to the corner.

"Fool!" he suddenly laughed. "Payson Esty was stabbed. The coroner's jury demonstrated that."

"Stabbed but none the less the victim of the infernal philter!" was the quick answer. "We will go down now, Mr. Hawk."

To this there was no reply and the next moment a man sprang across the room, dashed out the sash, and vanished!

Owlet saw him pick himself up on the pavement below.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TIGHTENING THE COIL AROUND HAROLD ESTY.

HARVEY HAWK's dash for freedom and his escape did not occupy much time. The leap was sudden and startling and the sash went outward with the man.

Old Owlet stood at the window and watched the cool head make off when he could have brought him down with the revolver. But such was not his design.

Harvey, very slightly hurt by his escapade, though cut some by the glass, vanished before the few people on the walk could realize that a man had actually jumped from a second story window to the sidewalk below.

"This is better than being dragged away by that fox," said he, as he continued his flight. "I must see Jack now. This is getting just a little too interesting to suit me and Jack must take a lively hand. Where is Jack?"

Jack Noddles, the so-called Scotland Yarder was not hard to find, and a few minutes after his escape Harvey came upon him in the same room where we saw him last with Sophy.

Noddles looked up with surprise when Harvey opened the door and showed his torn clothes and the blood-streaks still on his handsome face.

"You've been through a sausage-cutter, haven't you?" queried Jack. "Seems to me you've met with an adventure of some kind and that it got the better of you."

Hawk smiled grimly.

"That trail-dog must perish now!" cried he. "You must take a hand in this new feature of the game, for Orson Owlet is nearing the end of his trail."

Jack thought of Sophy's deed and answered:

"He's been settled. Have no fears in that direction."

"Settled?" roared Hawk. "You don't know how I have had to jump from his hands just now."

"Just now?" and Jack laid his cigar down and stared at his companion.

"Just now. It's not the first adventure I've had to-night, but of the other one I will not speak, for it concerned me individually. This one concerns us all."

"It is against the Circle, eh?"

"Yes, against all of us. Of course Captain Boyd's out of the game forever—"

"Out of the game?" interrupted Jack. "Tell me how."

"The fool couldn't wait for fate to take care of him, so he took care of himself. He's dead."

Harvey Hawk proceeded and related his experience in the Quaker City, coloring it to suit himself, and Jack Noddles listened without once interrupting him.

"Then," said Noddles, at the end of the narration, "then Sophy failed."

"Is Sophy here—in New York?"

This was news for the sport. That Jack's sister should make her appearance in the game was really startling to him for he knew something of the girl's rashness and nerve.

"Sophy is here," answered Jack. "I did not know she was doing to drop down upon us and she came without warning."

"And made a failure of her attempt to silence Orson Owlet?"

"It seems so from your last adventure."

The face of Harvey Hawk clouded.

"Women generally fail," said he, without looking up. "We must play fast now."

There was no reply and Jack began smoking again.

"What has become of Norma?" he asked at length.

Hawk shook his head.

"You should have looked after her before you left Philadelphia."

"I was only too eager to get away. The girl will not come back to New York."

"Not unless Orson Owlet brings her back."

"I will risk that. When she hears of Coyningham's death she will put many a mile between her and this fox of the trail. Let Norma drop out of notice."

"With what she knows?"

"Yes, for her lips are forever sealed, and she is as good as one dead as far as the past is concerned."

"But that is not the Code, Harvey," and Jack Noddles leaned forward and looked his companion in the eye.

Hawk was about to reply when the door behind him opened and following Jack's eye, he saw near the portal the slender figure of Sophy.

The false detective's sister had slipped down-stairs and into the room with little noise, and now she stood looking at Harvey, seen for the first time in years.

"You know him, Sophy?" said Jack.

The girl advanced and held out her hand, and Hawk took it lightly while he gazed into her face quite white and drawn.

"What were you telling Jack?" she asked. "I could not help overhearing some words. What were you saying about Orson Owlet?"

Harvey threw a quick look at Noddles and the latter came to his rescue.

"Harvey knows what you did," he said, to his sister. "He was telling me that it was a cool, bold play."

"But one which had to be made, eh? You men dared not play out that hand and I had to for you."

A smile came to Harvey Hawk's mouth, but he did not speak.

"I brought off the papers in triumph, too," continued Sophy. "I got everything I went for—his life and the documents."

"You did well, Sophy."

"Better than you would have done."

"I don't doubt that."

Sophy, with another look at Jack, withdrew, and the door closed behind her.

"She does not dream that she failed," said Hawk.

"No, and to tell her that she has might be followed by serious consequences. Let her know it not. Sophy is a bundle of nerves, and were she to hear suddenly that she failed to kill Orson Owlet she might go mad."

"Then we must finish the play. This man is too dangerous for us. Carmel—"

"Have you told Carmel about Cruel Coyningham?"

"Not yet. She sent me after the pair, you know—sent me over to Philadelphia to overtake Coyningham and Norma; but I was forestalled by the man's display of cowardice and his rash act in the upper room on Arch street."

A few minutes later Harvey Hawk was on the street, but this time he was not alone.

Jack Noddles walked at his side, and the pair turned up in another part of the city.

"Have you the key yet?" asked Jack.

Harvey nodded.

"You know the way. Norma put you onto that, and you can add another link to the chain to-night."

"In that house?"

"Yes."

Jack Noddles fished from his pocket a crumpled letter, which he secretly transferred to his companion.

"This is the new link," he went on. "You can place it in the bureau, in the lower drawer, and I will appear on the scene to-morrow."

Harvey seemed to remonstrate, but at the same time he took the letter and stowed it away in his pocket.

"Don't you think the play should end soon?" he asked, looking at Jack.

"It will end soon. It has almost reached the end now. What more is there to do, you ask? You ought to know, Harvey. The law is throttling the young man. You see the papers, don't you?"

Hawk nodded.

"Everything is dead against him—"

"And the only danger is that one man—that human being with the face of a Sphinx and the cunning of a ferret."

"Oh, as to that man we will beat him yet."

Further down the street they separated, and Harvey Hawk watched Noddles till he had passed out of sight.

"He is cool and full of cunning," mused he. "He would have made a good Scotland Yarder if he had turned his ingenuity in that direction instead of playing out some fool hands across the water. 'Jack Noddles, London Detective' sounds well this side the pond, but over there it would not do so well."

He ended by laughing to himself and vanished like Jack had done in a network of streets and under the lamps of New York.

But the handsome man had not vanished for good that night. There was work for Harvey Hawk, and with the crumpled letter which he carried in his pocket he made his way to the vicinity of Payton Esty's late home.

No one would have recognized him now. There were no traces of his wild leap visible; court-plaster and a little water had blotted them out, and he now stood on the sidewalk looking at the scene of the terrible crime.

Slipping to the rear of the mansion, where he found everything quiet, Harvey Hawk used a key which he took from his pocket and entered the house.

It was as still as death inside.

A low light burned in the main hall and fell softly over the rich carpet on the staircase.

The cool-headed sport made his way to the parlor, the door of which he opened noiselessly and looked in. The room was dark, but the light from the hall showed him the furniture and the paintings on the walls.

He turned back and went up stairs.

In the corridor above he walked noiselessly and at last stopped at Harold Esty's door.

It was shut but not locked, and he opened it with a smile and entered.

More than once this handsome burglar stopped and listened. Not a sound came up to interrupt his nocturnal raid.

He turned on the gas softly, but still enough to let him see what he was doing.

The bureau stood handy, and he stooped and pulled open the lower drawer.

In another instant the letter was drawn

from his pocket and his gloved hand slipped it down among the things in the drawer.

"That will do," said Harvey when he had performed the act. "I don't care for any more commissions like this. It's my share of the work perhaps. Let Jack do the rest. Heavens!"

He sprang up and fell back with the cry still on his lips. His eyes bulged from his head and he shook like a leaf, for before him stood beautiful Mora Esty!

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE EDGE OF A SECRET.

THE gloved sport could not breathe while he stared at the handsome girl dressed in white, and looking for all the world like a ghost.

It first occurred to him that she was looking him fairly in the face with a stare of recognition, but the next moment he saw into the true state of affairs.

Mora was once more a somnambulist, and saw no one as she came forward, and Harvey fell back almost to the wall while he gazed at her and held his breath.

What would the girl do?

Mora advanced to the bureau and opened the very drawer in which he had just deposited the letter. He saw her hand vanish among the contents of the drawer and remain there for a second.

"She will find the letter, but she must not keep it," grated Harvey Hawk. "It would ruin us to have her find it and turn it over to Orson Owlet."

But Mora did not discover the letter, for her hand came out empty and she fell back again to the door.

"Jupiter! what a scheme we missed," fell from Harvey's lips while he watched the girl. "No one knew anything of this peculiarity, and she might be where her brother is with more chances to pull hemp. Ah, there she goes, and I feel better."

Mora walked to the door and vanished into the hall. The gloved sport waited until she was gone, and then he crept to the hall and listened at the top of the stairs.

Mora had gone back to her own room—at least so thought Hawk, for he descended to the floor below and stopped there a moment, preparatory to quitting the mansion.

His work was done. He had carried out the play which Jack Noddles had started, and the letter in the bureau was to be unearthed on the morrow by this so-called ferret from Scotland Yard—unearthed to be used with terrible effect against Harold Esty.

Harvey in the hall heard footsteps on the stairs, and looking up as he fell back saw Mora once more.

This time the girl had robed herself more becomingly, and the man, hugging the wall in the shadows of the balustrade, watched her as she came down and moved toward the parlor.

Presently the sound of music came from that room, and he ventured to look in.

Mora was seated at the piano, with her back turned toward him, and he listened awhile, with a grin of pleasure at the corners of his mouth.

"It's time for me to go," said he. "I've played out my hand here, and if I linger something might occur not on the bills."

He drew back and crept down the hallway to the back door. His hand was there when he heard a cry, and turning he saw Mora Esty tottering back, having seen him at the last moment.

The city Adonis hardly knew what to do.

He saw Mora reel against the wall and thought at that moment that the wild cry that had parted her lips might be heard by the new maid if she had one and he would be seen again.

Harvey let her fall to the floor and with a last look turned to the door and vanished.

Once more on the street he looked back at the house and saw that it was as dark and silent as ever.

He hurried off to turn up in a little room the door of which he shut and securely bolted before he seemed to feel entirely safe.

"No more such adventures for me," he said to himself. "I've had enough to last me till doomsday and Jack and Carmel can have the rest of the work."

Then he thought of Orson Owlet, and his last adventure with the shadow-sphinx came back with startling distinctness.

"Why not get out of the game, but not like Cuyningham did?" he exclaimed. "Why not give them the slip and leave them to finish the business? There's nothing in it for me any longer—nothing but manacles if I remain. Why not make a bold play for the girl and vanish? To-morrow I'll look at the lay of the land. To-morrow I'll see the 'phone fairly and arrange for the last play by Harvey Hawk."

He turned in and went to bed.

The silence that soon filled the room was unbroken and the dim light that fell softly over the poor carpet revealed the figure of a man on a cot.

Harvey Hawk slept after his wild adventures of the night. He could sleep like a child even in the shadow of retribution, and the nearest clock striking the hours of that his last night of freedom did not break his dreams.

At the same time Orson Owlet was sitting in a chamber with a brilliant light looking into the pale face of Norma, the mad maid.

Mrs. Hopes has been roused from her peaceful slumbers and had brought Norma down stairs.

Old Owlet's face was a study.

Norma sat in an arm-chair and her face was white and fair.

"What does she say?" asked the detective, looking at Norma's guardian.

"But little and that little about the waves and the little cove," was the reply.

Owlet smiled.

"Does she ever refer to her old master, Payson Esty?" he asked.

"Her mind seems to be a blank so far as he is concerned. Once, however, I thought she was coming to him, but she suddenly drifted back to her childhood and all vanished."

At this juncture Norma laughed and stood erect.

"Don't you hear them now?" she cried. "There they come, racing in like a lot of riderless steeds and Phil will never get the dory launched."

Owlet and Mrs. Hopes exchanged looks.

"Norma?" spoke the detective.

Suddenly the girl turned to him and then came over to where he sat.

"Ah, you called me," she exclaimed. "You called me Norma." She passed her thin hand across her brow. "I am Norma, Mora Esty's maid."

The mention of a name seemed to have turned the current of her mind and she had been brought back from the waves and the boats.

"What did she do with the knife she hid in the drawer?" she went on. "Has she told you why she took it away? Was she afraid of the police?"

Old Owlet leaned toward the girl and took her hand.

"The knife," he said, "was found by a detective. It is used against Harold."

"Against him, eh? Why not against her?"

Mrs. Hopes clasped her hands and turned pale.

"This is terrible," said she. "Norma must have seen something in the house that night."

"More than she has yet told," was the low response. "She will tell more by and by," and he looked at the maid again.

"She keeps that secret, does she?" she suddenly went on. "Mora Esty keeps it from the world while her hands are the crimson ones. You haven't charged her with the deed, have you? No, you haven't thought of such a thing."

Old Owlet did not reply.

"Let her go on," his look said to Mrs. Hopes.

"I saw it all. I saw it all, I say. It was so well done that my heart stood still in my throat and when all was over she came."

"Mora?"

"Mora," the maid answered.

"But she did not come in until after the murder?"

"She took the knife away. I saw her."

"Where were you, Norma?"

It was a question which seemed to rouse in the maid's bosom a feeling of personal in-

security, for all at once she shrunk back to the chair and trembled there.

She had gone too far. She had unfolded a chapter which she had intended to keep, and not even the shattered mind had secured it to her.

From that moment she was quiet. Her lips came together and she looked at Orson Owlet, but spoke not.

"Come, go on. I am listening," said the detective. "You can save the innocent and punish the guilty. It is in your hands, girl."

But the lips did not uncloze.

"It is all over for to-night," said Mrs. Hopes.

All at once Norma, lifting a hand, revealed a strange mark on the white arm as the sleeve fell away from it.

"Did you see that?" suddenly ejaculated Mrs. Hopes. "I discovered it soon after she came. It is a brand."

"I saw it. It was a circle."

"A circle and within it a dagger. She tried to conceal it from me, but I had a good look at it during one of her naps."

By this time Norma had turned and was at the door. She stood there looking back at Owlet and Mrs. Hopes, and when they expected to see her vanish she came across the room, and stopped at the detective's chair.

"I am going away from here," she exclaimed. "I will not remain any longer. I will have to kill some one again if I do."

Mrs. Hopes looked at the detective, but did not speak. Her experience with insane people had been varied and she knew how to take them.

"You don't believe it," continued Norma. "You don't think I am going away. They want me. They want me to play out the game for them. Harvey, Jack and Carmel—I don't like Carmel, though—they want me to strike again. It was a fine play. First the potion and then—Hark! that was the big breaker that comes in from the heart of the sea."

With this the girl ran across the floor and disappeared beyond the door.

"You must watch her," said Orson Owlet. "I am picking up the links one by one and I hold nearly all now. That girl, mad as she is at times, will tell the truth by and by. She holds the key to the mystery. She knows. You must watch her, Harriet."

Mrs. Hopes promised and a moment later the man of trails stood once more underneath the lights of Gotham.

It was near midnight and he saw but few people on the street.

That portion of the city inhabited by Mrs. Hopes was quiet enough for any one, and when he started off he heard his own footsteps echo far away.

He went back to Mrs. Larrigan's—to the scene of his narrow escape at Sophy's hands, and letting himself into the chamber with his night-key he locked the door and turned on the light.

But the next instant he fell back with a slight exclamation for stretched on the floor at full length lay a woman, and Old Owlet bent over the body to look down into the white face and the clinched hands of the creature whose hands had lately attempted his life.

It was Sophy—Jack Noddles's sister.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

OLD POPSY'S CHILD.

To return to Popsy Vane whom we left in the Park. After his struggle with Harvey Hawk, the old man went back to his bench to wait for Norma.

If he had known that the girl was even then under Mrs. Hopes's care he would not have waited with such patience watching all who entered the gate and strolled past him.

Popsy did not see Hetty Hitts who sat near by during the battle, therefore he did not miss the girl when she got up and stole back to the street on her way home.

He became a statue in the gloom, now and then bending forward as the strollers grew fewer in numbers, and watching all with a pair of keen eyes as if he felt that Norma must come.

Ten struck and he was there still.

Eleven came and the strange old man con-

tinued to gaze about him as he shrunk from the light.

It was midnight and Popsy had not moved since his tussle with the city Adonis.

Those whose duty it is to clear the Park of loungers overlooked him.

It was nearly one when a figure flitted toward the old man. He saw it for a moment in a streak of light that fell across the walk and drew back with a sharp ejaculation.

She had come at last.

Old Popsy held his breath as the figure approached and all at once he sprung up and at it.

There was a slight scream as the figure recoiled, but one of Popsy's hands was thrust out and the apparition was his prisoner.

"I have been waiting for you," he said, looking into the white face which he drew toward him. "You don't know how long I have been here. Nearly all night."

"But you don't want me. I don't know you and besides—"

"By Jove! you have her eyes and her mouth! Who was your mother, child?"

"The waves that beat into the little cove."

"That's a pretty answer to my question, now isn't it?"

"But I know no other mother. I hear them even now, and unless you release me those from whom I have escaped will take me back."

"Take you back? I guess not."

Norma had come. She had carried out her threat made to Owlet and Mrs. Hopes that she would effect her escape. She had returned to the scenes of her work, and, probably finding Mora Esty's home closed against her, she had come to the Park as of old.

"Are they after you?" went on Popsy Vane. "I have a nice place and they won't find you there."

Norma caught at the idea immediately.

"Take me thither then," she demanded.

"Take me away from those who watch me."

Popsy proudly led the girl away. Out of the Park and across a almost deserted portion of the city he conducted the girl until he ushered her into his new quarters in Mott street.

"Do you live here?" asked Norma.

"No, I hide in this place," was the reply.

"Why do you hide?"

"Because I am hunted."

"I am hunted: that is, I have been watched. I told them I would break jail and that's why I am here."

She laughed at the end of her sentence and Old Popsy looked at her shaking his head sadly.

"She's loose in the upper story," he muttered. "Is this the girl whom Hetty saw in the Park—the one she said looked like Coral?"

"So," said the old magician, smoothing Norma's wealth of black tresses, "so you call the waves your mother?"

"Did I? How strange it was for me to say that. I have seen the waves and I hear them at all times. But who are you?"

"Popsy Vane—Popsy, the old astrologer, who, until a few days ago, had all the dupes he cared to hoodwink, but who now dare not go out in open day. They want me."

"For what? You didn't hide the knife in the bureau?"

"Well, I rather guess not, girl."

Norma looked away.

"Look here," and Popsy began to unwrap the daguerreotype he had exhibited to Hetty.

Norma sprung forward and took the picture from his hands, held it close to the light and gazed long and curiously at it. Her face did not change one whit during the stare.

"I wonder if she recalls a face like that?" thought Old Popsy.

"You don't know it, eh?" said the magician.

Norma shook her head.

"You look like her. You have the same eyes and your mouth is shaped just like Coral's was."

"Who was Coral?"

Popsy seemed to hesitate.

"They accused me—" he did not finish the sentence.

"But who was Coral?" persisted Norma. "You say she looked like me. Why should she?"

"Go back, girl. Give up your talk about the waves and the little cove. Think as far back as you can. Your mother must somewhere rise before you."

The maid seemed to fall into deep reflection. She leaned her head on her hands and thought, all the time watched by Popsy.

"No, I can't recall her. But stop! Let me chase the sea and the boats from my head."

"That will do it."

"I see a woman's face. It was very dark."

"So was Coral's."

"I see a trim figure and a hand that was soft and kind."

Popsy Vane did not seem to breathe.

"It was under a hot sun, but the little cove was sheltered."

"Yes, yes."

She took up the picture and looked at it again. The old man waited patiently.

"I see her now. Was she my mother?"

"She must have been."

"And my father?"

There was no reply only the old man seemed to shrink within himself.

"What of him?" continued Norma.

"What of my father?"

Popsy Vane seemed to grow into a statue of stone.

"I am your father."

He spoke with an effort and bent forward to watch the effect of his words upon the maid.

She broke out into a fit of laughter.

"You? No, you are not my father. That cannot be. Mrs. Boutelle used to tell me that I was a waif, picked up at sea and she ought to know."

Old Popsy drew from his bosom a little packet which he opened before Norma's fixed gaze.

The three links of the gold bracelet rolled out and fell on the table!

At once the dark eyes dilated and Norma put out her hand and clutched them.

"You have seen them before?" eagerly asked Popsy.

"Somewhere, somewhere," answered the girl. "I have seen them, but perhaps in a dream. I can't tell."

"It was in no dream. It was in real life. That bracelet belonged to your mother. You are Tina."

"Tina? Tina who?"

The astrologer looked as if he were afraid to speak the answer.

"Not now," he answered at length. "Some other time, girl. I am your father. I have found my own at last."

"Where is my mother, then?"

"She is dead."

"Mrs. Boutelle thought so, too."

"She died long ago."

"In this city?"

"No, across the sea. Do you remember anything like this?"

Popsy Vane leaned toward the floor and made a loop with his arms, and Norma gave a quick delighted laugh.

"You used to make a loop that way for Jocko to jump through."

Popsy grinned and then caught Norma's hands.

"No one but your father would know anything about your playing, girl," he exclaimed. "We used to play with Jocko and he used to jump through my hands, like that."

"Yes, yes. I remember that."

"Then you don't doubt me now, eh?"

"I oughtn't, to but you look so old and so strange."

"I am old; I am strange. But why have you been watched, girl? Why have you been cooped up?"

"They think I know something about that crime."

"What crime?"

Norma seemed to breathe hard.

"You know; the whole city knows," she said at last. "It shocked the town like an earthquake. It fell like a thunderbolt from the clear blue. I refer to the murder of Payson Esty."

"You were Miss Mora's maid?"

"I was in the house in that capacity at the time. But let us not talk about that. Since you are my father, tell me all about my mother and the home which has almost faded from my recollection. Tell me while I listen."

"But tell me one thing first," replied Popsy. "You know what they have done. The millionaire's son lies in prison charged with the murder."

There was no reply.

"You were maid and you must know something for you were at home that night and your room is on the same floor. What was that you said awhile ago about some one hiding a knife in the bureau? They found it there against the young man."

"I know they did. I knew it was there—knew it all the time."

"My God! and why didn't you make way with it if he was innocent?"

"Well, I did not," and a laugh followed the sentence.

"Tina—I can't call you Norma any more—Tina, if the hounds of the law suspect this, they will dog your footsteps, they will make you tell the truth."

Norma came forward and stopped right in front of Popsy, her whole frame in a quiver of rage and her white hands clinched.

"I defy them," she cried. "I can keep what I know for that belongs to the Code."

"To the Code?" exclaimed the old man, falling back. "Heavens! girl, you haven't gone that far?"

"Never mind. I will keep my secret and they may hang the man they've caught if they want to."

The face of the astrologer seemed to grow white and all the lines showed in a spasm of agony.

CHAPTER XXIX.

OWLET AND JACK'S SISTER.

THE startling sight of Sophy lying on the floor of his room was the unexpected for Orson Owlet.

The woman was unconscious and the detective raised her up and began to restore her to life.

It was slow work, for Sophy seemed to have passed beyond life's borders, but at length she came round and could stare at the man whose life she had attempted.

She had come back, perhaps to repeat the attempt; she had stolen again to the detective's room at Mrs. Larrigan's, but something had thrown her into unconsciousness, and in that condition the ferret had found her on the floor.

Owlet wanted no intrusion now.

He did not dream that even while he worked with Jack Noddles's sister, Old Popsy, in another part of the city, was trying to convince Norma that he was her father.

Sophy, or "Natalie" as she now called herself, stared at Orson Owlet, but said nothing. What passed through her mind could not be told by the man who watched her; but he seemed to take delight in seeing her back in his little room.

"No questions, no lies," suddenly said Sophy. "I have tried and have failed. Let us be quits."

"As you say," was the response. "You thought you would make a cleaner job of it did you?"

"I did. I conceal nothing. I came back to kill you."

"You know me then?"

"You are Dunbar Vivier. You are the man who made Jack wear the number which they sewed on his sleeve at Dartmoor—26,999, and you stopped me after the arrest to say that I should never cross your path if I valued my liberty. Why shouldn't I try to kill you?"

"In your mind you have provocation," answered Owlet. "You are Sophy Sares."

"I am Sophy—Sophy who, but for your man-hunt in England years ago, might have been a better woman. Perhaps it was bred in the bone, for Jack was wild."

"Jack, the London Detective," smiled Owlet.

"You find out everything. You will take them all in again?"

"I will do my duty."

"Go and do it then, but take me now," and Sophy rose and held out her hands.

Orson Owlet looked up into her face and saw that it was as white as a cloth.

"Take me now for if you don't I may try to kill again. I never give in, you know."

"But I don't want you, Sophy."

"I might warn them all."

"Of course. You haven't been here long?"

"I came over three months ago."

"You knew they were here?"

"That is my secret."

"Were you still following the Captain? You used to love Cruel Coyningham, Sophy."

"I love him still. I know that he is dead, that he died by his own hand because your shadow hovered over him. Isn't that cause enough for me to dagger you?"

"Come, woman. You might save Jack."

Sophy seemed to jump at the chance.

"You don't mean that?" and she bent toward the detective and looked him in the eye. "You don't intend to save Jack at all."

"You can save him, I say. Jack didn't commit that crime."

"I believe you."

"You know who did."

"I?"

"You belong to the Red Circle. The brand is on your arm as it is on the arm of each member."

"Look!" laughed Sophy and she opened her sleeve showing Old Owlet the same sort of tattoo he had seen on Norma's flesh at Mrs. Hopes's. "It is there, as you say—the mark or the Circle. It has been on a good many arms and some are now powerless."

"As I have said," continued Owlet, "you know all the secrets of the Circle. That is a part of the Code."

"What do you know of the Code?"

"You forget who I am, woman."

"That is impossible. Forget who you are? No, no!"

"Why not tell the truth and save Jack?"

"But you would drag him in with the rest."

"Not if he is innocent."

Sophy took a turn about the room, glanced down into the lighted street and came back.

"Jack is innocent," she said.

"But he has posed as a detective when he no more belongs to Scotland Yard than you do, Sophy."

"But Jack knows how to play that card. He has seen a good deal of the beagles in his time."

"Even when he played the flute in Dartmoor he saw them."

"Yes; but he played it too much. You heard him then and that's how you discovered that Jack was 26,999 in this very room."

Orson Owlet laughed lightly as he recalled his discovery of Jack Noddles's true identity while in bed.

"Who did it, Sophy?"

In an instant the woman fell back and her face grew sphinx-like again.

"They've got him," she cried.

"But not the right man. They have Harold Esty in the shadow of the noose, but you know, Sophy, that he isn't the right man."

"They found the dagger in his drawer. They could not find the letter which he said he had received from his father forgiving all."

"But who found the dagger?"

Sophy seemed to wince.

"Jack did," she said. "I'll admit that."

"Jack as the Scotland Yarder, but really Jack, a member of the Red Circle."

"That is true."

"But after all, what proof is there that the dagger killed Payson Esty?"

"Enough! The blood on it—the stains on the linen in which it was wrapped. All that and more—the stab in the neck."

Owlet watched her a moment in silence.

"You don't care to save Jack," he went on at length. "You don't seem to care if we stretch him with the balance."

"But I tell you he didn't do it."

"Why don't you take advantage of my offer? Tell me the truth and you door opens."

Sophy seemed to look longingly at the door leading to the steps, but she did not speak.

"Payson Esty long ago was Adam Caine."

"So he was."

"And he, too, belonged to the Circle."

"That was before my time."

"He repudiated the rest of you when you came back to America and tried to bleed

him. He refused to be bled by Cruel Coyningham and company."

"I don't know."

"Ay, but you do know," said Owlet coolly. "You know that he refused to give you anything but an interest in the mica mines. That was not enough. Then you got it into your heads that he was going to betray you all—that he might open up the sealed books of your lives—tell how Jack had served in Dartmoor, how 'Cruel' Coyningham had been shut up for forgery, how Harvey Hawk, the handsome Harvey, with claws like his namesake, knew what it was to feel the prison lash, and how Carmel—the beautiful Carmel, the Carmel with the soft eyes, and velvet fringed talons—had once been transported from a land which was not her own."

"You have picked up a great deal, Orson Owlet as they call you here. I wish I had killed you the other time."

"But you did not, Sophy. Now what are you going to do? I shall leave this room in a few minutes."

"With me, of course?"

"Why shouldn't it be with you? You belong to me now. Still, for all that has happened, you don't care to save Jack."

"That would be treachery."

"It would be love also. You love Jack."

She started. There came to the woman's face a flush that lingered there.

"You are stone, woman. I shall go and play out my hand. I have about all the threads in it. All I have to do is to put out my hand and pull in the drag-net and in it will be found the person who killed the millionaire."

"But it will not be Jack."

"We will see who it will be. Jack knew that Popsy Vane dealt in poisons capable of taking human life without a struggle. Why couldn't Payson Esty have been killed with one of those philters? There was a stab in the throat and a dagger has been found; but the poison might have worked first."

Sophy seemed to become rigid in her chair. She looked toward the door and seemed to measure the distance between her and it, and Owlet, remembering his last adventure with Harvey Hawk, moved in that direction.

He was not a moment too soon, for all at once Jack Noddles's sister left her chair and sprang forward, but the hand of the prince of ferrets fastened at her wrist.

She was too late!

While he held her thus she gazed into his eyes as if she would kill him with a look, but Old Owlet did not stir.

"Since you want to go out you shall go," said he. "Come, Sophy, we will find it open. In fact, it is never closed."

"What, the station?"

He nodded.

"Is it worse than the Bow Street Station?"

"It is just as secure, woman."

"No, not there!" and Sophy pulled back the length of Orson Owlet's arm. "You shall not take me thither."

"Tell the truth, then, for, as a keeper of the secrets of the Red Circle, you know."

There was no answer and the detective dragged the unwilling woman across the floor.

"Wait!" cried Sophy, when near the door. "I will save Jack. I will tell the truth, so help me Heaven."

She was not released; the old ferret was not to be deceived by a creature like Sophy Sares.

"Very well. Who is the guilty one?"

"Carmel!" she whispered.

"It is not true," replied Orson Owlet. "Carmel didn't do it and you know it, woman."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE FLIGHT OF THE RED-HANDED.

SOPHY was not at all abashed by this denial.

"You don't believe 'me, then?" she said, looking at Orson Owlet. "You asked me to tell the truth, yet you doubt it when told."

"Never mind, woman. I shall prove that Carmel did not kill Payson Esty."

"Prove it, then!"

She was as defiant as ever, and again her glance wandered to the door, but the hand

of the detective was at her wrist and there was no escape.

An hour afterward Sophy languished in a cell and the detective, seeing her fixed for the night, had turned to other scenes.

Harvey Hawk, waiting for the morrow, was sleeping in the little quarters which he occupied dreamless of the threads which the fearless ferret was picking up and weaving into a net of conviction.

He rose with the day and dressed.

"Now for the swoop," said he, as he went to the window and gazed down into the yet almost deserted street. "Don't I know that this man-hunter is closing in on the Circle, and it behooves me to make myself as scarce as possible."

He went down to breakfast and after that smoked a cigar in a quiet little Park near by.

The day broadened and Hawk went over to that part of the city occupied by Hetty Hello.

The curtains of the girl's house had not been parted for the day and he watched the premises some time.

"No one up yet," said Harvey to himself.

"I will go back awhile."

Back he went, but not home again. He turned up at a house some distance from the telephone girl's home and entered.

All was quiet inside. He recalled his experience in Mora's home—the sleep-walker and his narrow escape—and while he waited in a darkened parlor for some one to come he indulged in another smoke.

"Well?" said a voice behind him and he blew the white smoke aside to look up into Carmel's face.

Carmel had come in noiselessly.

She wore a dark gown and her figure seemed to have increased in stature for she stood proudly before the Adonis and looked at him with a cold eye.

"Well, you are back, I see. Let me hear what you have to say."

Harvey looked a moment longer and then answered:

"I guess you are satisfied. I followed them to the Quaker City and Cruel Coyningham will bother us no more."

A singular smile wreathed Carmel's lips.

"Did you kill him?" and she leaned toward Hawk until their faces seemed to touch.

Carmel had evidently heard of the Captain's death.

"Here," suddenly cried Carmel snatching a newspaper from the table. "This tells the tale. You must have lost your nerve! This man died by his own hand and the girl—she who has the secret—you let her escape, did you?"

"Really, Carmel—"

"You let her get away it seems, for nothing is mentioned about her here. He took his own life like a coward and you—Where were you afterward?"

Harvey could not speak.

"Don't you know that he carried some important papers upon his person? Where are they?"

"I had them—"

"Oh, you had, eh? You came down upon the dead like a vulture, did you? You must be the unknown man who was found with the Captain by the policeman and the boy of the house."

"I was there."

"The papers then! I want them," and Carmel held out her bloodless hand.

Harvey drew back.

"Confound it, woman, those papers I destroyed."

"You did? Why should you destroy them?"

"Don't you know that I might have been robbed on my way back? It was a little too risky to fetch them along."

"Who would have plundered you?"

"That man, perhaps."

"Dunbar Vivier? Nonsense! He was not near you at the time. You destroyed the documents found on Coyningham's person? What were they?"

"His confession and some other documents that hardly related to the Circle."

Carmel gave him a doubting look and drew off.

It was evident that she no more than half believed him.

"You know that Sophy has come upon the stage?" she said at last.

"I have seen the girl."

Carmel's brow clouded.

There was no love between these two women.

"Jack will regret this as long as he lives," she almost hissed. "He should have sent her away at once. She has no discretion and is liable to do wild things. Why, she has already tried to kill the detective."

"And has failed."

"Of course. A rage-blinded creature like Sophy would be sure to make a balk of the matter. Now we must strike."

"Yes."

"The hand we started in to play is still ours; but we must to work. This man, as you know, is picking up link by link the chain of truth. What if he should find Norma?"

"Oh," smiled Harvey, "he can't do that."

"Not if the girl goes further. She is a strange woman and I can't say what she will do now that Cruel Coyningham is dead."

"She won't come back here, that's pretty certain."

"I hope not."

Harvey was anxious to get away.

He had business elsewhere, and, then, he did not care to be longer in Carmel's presence. He knew the Queen of the Red Circle and had not forgotten her promise of reward in case he followed Cruel Coyningham to the end.

He had done this, yet he had not carried out to the letter Carmel's commands.

He had seen the Captain lying dead on the floor of the room in Philadelphia, yet he had not taken his life. Dead, but not murdered.

Hawk rose and looked once more at Carmel.

Did she suspect flight on his part? Did she believe that he was about to abandon the game and leave her and Jack to fight it out with Orson Owlet who had sworn to discover the hand that took Payson Esty's life?

At any rate Carmel came over to him and her hand fell lightly upon his sleeve.

"You are going away?" she said. "You won't come back again."

"Going away?" cried Harvey, feigning surprise at the accusation. "What, abandon you?"

"Look me in the eye, Hawk!" she went on. "You contemplate flight. You are going to play coward worse than Coyningham did."

"It is false. I—"

She crossed over to the mantel and snatched from its top a long-bladed dagger which she held out in her hand with the hilt toward him.

"Better this than flight now," she went on coolly. "Plunge this into your heart rather than abandon your companions of the Circle at this juncture. It will be better for you. Then the soft hand of this merciless tracker, this man of clues, will not hand you over to justice, for if you fly he will find you even if he is compelled to track you across the sands of Asia or down into the dustholes of London."

Pale of face, Harvey Hawk fell back from the blazing eyes of this woman.

"Which do you choose, the dagger or flight?" she continued, the dagger still gazing at him though the ruby set in the top of the black hilt. "You can't escape if you run, if you stay you may silence this man."

"No one talks of flight but you, Carmel."

"No, but your eyes look it," was the quick response. "You were on the verge of it."

He laughed but it was a hollow laugh full of cowardice which he tried to drown in the cachinnation.

"You won't take it? You will remain and fight?"

"I remain!"

Carmel threw the blade upon the chair.

"See that you do," she cried. "The crisis has come. The Circle is battling for existence. Jack will tell you so, and the girl who has come to curse us—show me her!" and Carmel's hands came out and clinched convulsively. "Once across the water when she played a treacherous hand I wanted to strangle her; but now—now! Where is Sophy, man?"

Harvey said he didn't know. He had seen her but once and that was in Jack's presence, and he hadn't kept an account of her.

"Come back soon. Come to me by noon and we will weave a net for this sharp of sharps. We will show Dunbar Vivier that as Orson Owlet or even under his old name if he cares to go back to it, he cannot beat the Red Circle."

"I will come back."

A cooler lie had never passed this man's lips. He spoke it while he looked into Carmel's eyes and felt that at least he had deceived her.

He went out to gasp in the rich air of that morning and to look once at the house while he chuckled inwardly to think that he was going to give them all the slip.

As for Carmel herself she went to the window, pulled the curtains aside and smiled.

"A coward at heart he meditates flight, but it will be his last."

Harvey Hawk went back to Hetty's home.

As he turned into the street where the girl lived and was near the house she came out.

Instantly a smile of pleasure came to his lips.

"My luck!" said he, increasing his gait. "Hawk's luck has never yet deserted him in time of need," and he followed, keeping watch of Hetty.

She led him a short chase, for all at once she dodged into a little store into which he followed.

Hetty started as she turned and came face to face with the handsome man.

"One word with you," and the cool-headed sport sidled up to her while she walked toward the door. "You know me. You once seemed to act as though you didn't care to save Harold Esty."

"I never said that I would not save him if I could."

"Not that, perhaps. But you recall our last meeting in the restaurant when I gave you a chance to prove him innocent?"

"I recall that meeting."

"Good! I thought you were blessed with a good memory and that you would not forget an important meeting like that. One promise from you sets him free."

Hetty, white-faced and trying to keep cool, looked at him and waited.

"Become my wife and he goes free. The law will never reach him, innocent or guilty—"

"Never!"

"You don't know, girl, that I can twist the rope for him. You don't realize—"

"I have answered you. You are in the plot. You are Harvey Hawk. Take care that you do not occupy the cell in which he languishes now."

The city Adonis with a sudden start turned white.

Hetty turned and vanished.

"The jig's up," said he. "It was a fool play anyhow—right here on the street! I deserve just what I'm likely to get now that she knows who I am."

He looked down the street a moment and turned back. Truly the lines were tightening and he could almost feel the noose under his chin.

"Fight it out both of you," he cried. "Jack and Carmel, fight it to a finish with this ferret of ferrets. Harvey Hawk vanishes forever from the game."

Half an hour later he emerged from his little boarding-house. There was a pile of ashes in the grate and some little films of what had been paper on the floor.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE LAST SWOOP.

"COME to me. I have found Tina."

This was the brief message which found Orson Owlet as he was about to quit Mrs. Larrigan's for what he hoped would prove the last chapter in the mystery.

There was no signature, but the ferret knew the strange characters and the long scrawling hand and he went at once.

Opening a door in a rickety house in Mott street he was startled by a cry and before him stood Popsy Vane and Norma.

The maid shrunk back, white-faced and terror-struck, and her hand closed protectingly on the old astrologer's arm.

She was insane no longer, but she looked

frightened and Orson Owlet stopped at the door and looked at the pair.

"This is Tina. You have heard of her—Coral's child and mine. This is the little one who was stolen from us years ago and who was tracked to sea when the trail was lost. I came back to Coral, you know—it was in Seville—and when my wife died soon afterward they tried me for murder, but they proved nothing. I have told Tina all. They had a hold on me, those people of crime had, for I dealt even then in strange things which sometimes took human life, but I never gave Coral a powder."

"Tina came to me in the Park. She has been Norma, but now she is Coral's child with her mother's wonderful eyes and her mouth. You know this man, girl?"

Norma came forward and stopped in front of the detective.

"You can tell him all you know of the crime of the millionaire's mansion," continued Popsy Vane. "It is a strange narrative, Orson—one that is hard to believe."

"She can tell it by and by."

"Why not now?"

"Wait till I have caught my man."

Norma started violently.

"Thank God he says 'Wait till I have caught my man,'" she exclaimed. "Then he does not believe that it was Mora's hand."

"It was not! Mora, no matter what you and others may have seen in the silent hours of the night within that house. I have seen it too. I know that Mora walks in her sleep; that she goes first to her father's room and thence to Harold's with a dagger, that she places the knife in the bureau drawer—"

"She does! she does!" cried Norma.

"But she did not do it. She found the knife, however, in her father's neck, found it there that night; but she left it where it was. She was asleep then. By and by she came back wide awake—that was before Harold made his terrible discovery—and she carried the blade away. It was found in Harold's bureau—found there by Jack Noddles. He knew where to look for it. My God! I told him!"

"You told him, girl?" echoed Orson Owlet.

Norma shrunk back to where Popsy sat breathless and with a stare in his deeply-buried eyes.

"I was in the web. I could not get out of it. My oath fastened me there as a fly is fastened in the web of the cruel spider. I fell into the hands of the Circle a year ago. I could not resist that handsome man—Harvey Hawk. But now," she went over and laid her hand on Popsy's sleeve, and stooping kissed his wrinkled forehead. "Now you can take me with you, but I have found him at last."

The old man looked up and smiled.

"You let him into the house that night, Norma. You knew what was to take place."

"He came for a stolen interview," was the reply. "Murder was the last thing I thought of, but when it had been done I had to conceal it, for was I not one of the Red Circle and wasn't my life in the balter with the rest of them? But go. Find the right man for you say you know him."

Orson Owlet with another glance at father and child left the room and went back to the trail.

Harvey Hawk, ready for flight despite his solemn promise to Carmel, had gone some little distance.

He was not the same Harvey as before. The black mustache, which made an Adonis of him, had been sacrificed.

Why had he ever come back to New York anyhow?

He had simply thrown his own self into the net and had lost Hetty at the same time.

Like a fly he had returned to the flame once too often and his wings were already feeling the heat.

Fear lent speed to his limbs now.

He regretted that he had failed to filch another philter from Popsy Vane.

He cursed the ill-luck which for the first time in years had fallen to his share.

On, on! It was like the flight of Cain from the presence of the Avenger. It was the flight of the blood-stained and the last effort of the hunted guilty.

Once he thought of turning round and

surrendering himself to the first officer he met.

That would be robbing Orson Owlet of his triumph anyhow. It would be cheating the man of many victories on the trail of crime; it would be getting at the last terrible moment the best of the indefatigable hunter down of criminals.

But something urged him on—something that seemed to whisper in his ear that after all he might escape for New York is large.

He had lost heart at last, this cool man had; he had given up hopes of ultimate freedom away from the land of the free and where a soft but terrible hand like Orson Owlet's did not close on its victims.

"Why not go back?" said he at last, though no one was on his track. "Captain Coyningham had the nerve, why shouldn't I be just as brave?"

He started with glee at the thought. Yes, why shouldn't he be "just as brave" as the man who had died in the Quaker City?

Harvey Hawk turned back.

He re-entered his little room and shut the door. In his haste he forgot to lock it. His nerves were unstrung anyhow.

He went over to the table and sat down. He drew toward him a sheet of paper and picked up a pencil.

"Why should I?" he cried suddenly, throwing the pencil across the room. "I will leave nothing for that man—nothing to give him one thrill of triumph."

The door opened and Harvey Hawk sprang erect, turning over the chair and nearly upsetting the table.

"I might have known it!" he exclaimed. "I might have guessed that I would fail to lock the door."

Orson Owlet stood before him fresh from Norma and her father.

The cool-headed sport looked into the old ferret's eyes and then with a grin held out his hands.

"They never have escaped you," he said, "and they never will. You must be Fate itself."

"No, I am Dunbar Vivier."

It is a month later.

Once more the shutters of the millionaire's mansion on the avenue are open.

There sit in the parlor three persons and one fair girl is looking up into a pale face, while her hands are folded in his lap.

"Out of the darkness of suspicion into the sunlight of proven innocence," says she. "It is worth waiting for, Harold."

"True, Hetty, and Mora yonder, she realizes that I had a right to seal my lips to the officers of justice though I labored under a terrible impression."

Mora Esty smiles sadly.

She knows all; she knows that Harold had seen her somnambulist pantomime, seen it on the very night of the dark crime in the house after Harvey Hawk had killed their father with the potion, and then to fasten the deed upon the innocent had plunged the dagger into the throat to the hilt.

And the Adonis languishes in the cell from which he will not emerge till he walks forth to death; and Jack Noddles, stripped of his so-called authority, exposed to the world, not as a London Detective but as Convict 26,999 of Dartmoor, is near his old friend of the Circle, and Carmel lies dead in her elegant home.

She for one had the "nerve," to follow Captain Coyningham.

Popsy Vane and Tina have vanished, and the keeper of the secret of their whereabouts is Orson Owlet.

Let him keep it, and let us hope that far away from the scene of the startling drama they may find that rest for which they have yearned.

Hetty Hitts—Hetty Hello, if you please, reader—has just become a bride, and she and Mora can stand in the sunlight and, looking back, feel that a strong hand and a true brought both out of the shadow and saved Harold's life.

It is a conclusion happily brought about by the cunning of one man, for, but for the hand of Owlet, the Detective, the innocent would have gone down into a felon's grave and the Red Circle have scored its greatest triumph.

THE END.

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